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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Narrative Journeys: A Mother/Teacher's Story

BY

Merle L. Kennedy

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated, with love, to my daughters Jessica and Treva. It is through the stories they shared with me that I awakened to both the pain and the possibility of schooling.

Narrative Journeys: A Mother/Teacher's Story

Abstract

This narrative inquiry tells my story as a mother returning to teaching after a fourteen year absence. This story is nested within my 'self' exploration in the form of narrative journeys. I have presented my lived experience of returning to teaching through journal excerpts. Wrapped around these journal excerpts is my restorying, my development of both an undertanding of my 'self' and an understanding of my work in the classroom. Woven into my story is a moral/feminist critique because, for me, this is a way of working towards change in our schools. It is a way of presenting teaching as I know it, an act infused with a morality of caring.

Acknowledgements

My relationships within various communities have served as wellsprings for my knowing. I am indebted to the many individuals who have helped me along the way.

The words and deeds of the caring school staff with whom I worked are woven into my understanding of an ethic of care.

The children in my classroom hold a special place in my heart. When all was said and done they had affirmed my emerging sense of my 'self'.

My fellow students were always willing to engage in dialogue, both written and oral, to help me with my work.

My committee gave generously of their time and their input was invaluable. The time they gave over to me, as well as their flexibility, ensured my successful completion.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
1.	An Introduction	1
2.	Narrative Journeys	4
	Family Stories	4
	Schooling Stories	7
	Beginning Teacher Stories	9
	Mothering Stories	16
	Stories of Re-educating A Mother/Teacher	19
3.	Making Connections	23
4.	My Research Journeys	28
	Envisioning My Research	29
	Experiencing My Research	40
	Collecting And Preparing My Stories	49
5.	A New Narrative Journey Begins	52
	Alone In The Classroom: Beginning My Work	52
	Together In The Classroom: Beginning Our Work	54
	Developing Relationships	56
	Restorying Our Classroom Understanding Of 'Control'	59
	Restorying My Image Of Myself As A Teacher	65
	Becoming A Community Of Learners	69
	Expectations For My Work: Hearing Many Voices	72
	Building A Classroom Community Through Different Kinds of Stories	79
	Restorying My Life As A Mother/Teacher	83
	Working Together In The Classroom	95
	Restorying Community: A Sense Of Home	97
	An Emerging Image Of A Mother/Teacher	103
	Lessons From My Students	106
	Restorying My Understanding Of Evaluation	110
	Connecting Learning With Teaching	112
	The Journey's End	115
6.	Teaching Is A Moral Act	120
References		131

Chapter 1

An Introduction

> *Women teachers fight to keep homes and classrooms out of chaos as we care for husbands, friends, elderly parents, children, neighbours, colleagues and students. We need to learn more about each other. As women, daughters, and teachers we need to know and to trust the hands that will receive our students, our children and grandchildren next September. We have much to gain and to learn as we share each other's stories.*
>
> *Simonson, 1991, p. 23*

We women have always engaged in telling stories. We seek out one another and privately share that which resides in both our heads and our hearts. There is a tacit understanding that our stories will be taken seriously because, in the moment of telling, we are as one. The story unites us, it connects my life to yours and your life to mine. Our feelings of aloneness and isolation are temporarily ameliorated. "You too," we delight in saying in a voice that is both question and exclamation. The risk in sharing temporarily fades as we connect through this shared experience.

We shared our stories when we found ourselves together in a university course. Husbands and children were the mainstay of our existence and we worried together about how everyone was coping with mom at school, including mom. We shared our stories when I was a supply teacher and you were an intern. We both felt misunderstood by a school board that seemed unwilling to hire middle-aged mothers because, they inferred, we would not spend enough time in the school. We shared our stories when I returned to full-time teaching. Your life story, in many ways, paralleled mine. You understood much of the turmoil that I was experiencing and you opened my eyes to the possible. None of us found answers. Our need was not for answers, we needed to know that we were not alone. We

needed someone to say, "I understand what you are experiencing." From this we found the strength to face another course, another rejected teaching application, another day with a difficult class.

We told stories because it helped us to make our own sense of the world. Each one of us was rooted in a particular context and while we celebrated the similarities we knew there were differences. That is why we women weren't looking to each other for answers. In the strength of our connections to one another we sought our own answers.

We have learned to keep our stories private, in silence we are not subject to ridicule. "Where did you ever get that idea?" someone might ask. "Don't be silly," someone might say. We have even learned to see the details of our lives as trivial, unimportant. 'Just a housewife' is a common phrase in public discourse. I listened and appeared to acquiesce to the powers that be, but privately I raged.

We need to begin to make our stories a part of public discourse. The sustenance that I have drawn from your stories and that you have drawn from mine is the sustenance we now need to offer to other women because with sustenance comes the possibility of growth. When we shared our stories we were momentarily freed, empowered to see in new ways.

It is also true that what women know and the ways in which they come to know are "submerged and go unrecognized because the dominant culture describes learning only in accordance with its own interests and understanding" (Miller, 1976, p. 55). Raising children is an example of a different kind of learning.

What one learned yesterday is not good enough and does not apply

> today. One cannot hope to use it exactly, not even by analogy, because the situation has already changed. Thus what women are doing in an everyday-kind-of way involves a different kind of learning. (It is important to note that this complex learning occurs also in women who do not have children. Girls develop it through childhood and continue the process as they grow up.) (p. 55)

As we told our stories we were grappling with our sense of 'self,' what Miller (1976) called our "own development and enlargement" (p. 56) and inherent in this process is real change, "change in the very basis of everyone's existence and the way each person defines her or his self" (p. 56). As I tell my story now I am engaging in research, "a hermeneutic circle of the soul, ever enlarging its self-story" (Grumet, 1983, p. 323). I am hopeful that my ever enlarging self-story will lead me to new understandings and possibilities for living together with children in the space we call the classroom.

Chapter 2

Narrative Journeys

I have begun the journey that Heilbrun (1988) referred to when she described the women poets of the generation born between 1923 and 1932. "These women, all of them middle class and white, simultaneously dismantled the past and reimagined the future" (p. 60). The word dismantle is an important one and to me it means restorying, understanding in new ways. It is on the particular that I have focussed. It is my history that I have remembered, a history that I have recalled in a very personal way. This helped me to understand myself in the present and to reimagine my future.

I am ever mindful of which stories I have chosen to share and which stories I have chosen to keep locked in my memory bank. These stories fit into a broad categorization I think of as my teacher stories. Each story that I recalled unlocked any number of related stories. These related stories played at the periphery of my consciousness, some eventually making it into print, others sliding in and out of my thinking as I tried to make sense of the image I have constructed and, indeed, continue to construct of myself as a teacher.

Family Stories

> *What the family tells us has a force and power that we never quite leave behind. What they tell us is our first syntax, our first grammar, the foundation onto which we later add our own perceptions and modifications. We are not entirely free to challenge the family's beliefs as we might challenge any other system of belief. And even when we do challenge, we half disbelieve ourselves.*
>
> *Stone, 1988, p. 101*

I have always known that I would be a teacher. As a pre-schooler, I am told, I spent a good deal of time instructing the neighbourhood children. Once I began my own schooling this play took on a much more formal 'look' but the one constant was that I remained in the role of teacher. The student body was made up of my sister and brother, my cousins and friends. The girls liked to play school. The boys could be talked into playing but they were more difficult to teach and so they wandered in and out of this ongoing game.

Occasionally I would swap roles with one of the girls but this was only done to keep up their interest so that I would not lose them to some other game. I had no interest in being a student in the game called school. There were no decisions to be made, no control to be exercised. I knew everything they tried to teach because I was older than they. They knew this too and so I would soon return to playing the role of teacher and the game would go on as before.

It gave me great pleasure to turn my mother's laundry room into a schoolroom. I later moved my school to another, less distracting part of the basement but my earliest memories are of rows of desks set amongst the laundry tubs, ringer washer, and makeshift drying lines. Setting the scene took up a lot of my time and I was always proud of the results. When the students were seated in their desks and our game of school would begin I always had a feeling of 'rightness,' everything was perfect, as it should be. I was a good teacher.

I spent a lot of time teaching printing and writing. I can still see my sister in tears because she was unable to form her letters in exactly the same way that I was teaching her to do. She knew I was right and she kept at it until she had mastered

the form I was teaching. Another student, a boy, was learning to print his name but he could not print the letter 'Y', it always came out upside down. Try as I might I could not get him to print that letter properly. He didn't last long at our game. If you were going to play school with me you had to get things right. As I progressed through elementary school my game of school became more elaborate. Now it included fire drills, detentions, recess and supply cupboards.

By the time I left elementary school I wasn't playing school anymore. This withdrawal was temporary and marked a transition from the game to real-life attempts at teaching. I would soon become a sunday school teacher, church group leader and reading tutor.

My earliest memories of being a teacher came to me through the stories that my mother told me. I cannot draw a line between what I remember and what my mother remembered and told me. My memories and those of my mother blur into one picture of me as a teacher. 'Good teachers are born not made' was one of her favourite sayings and it was evident to her that I was born to teach. In the estimation of those who mattered, adults, I was a good teacher. I felt successful in my play so I, too, soon came to the conclusion that I was, indeed, born to teach.

Britzman (1986) wrote about the myths that teachers live by. One of these myths is that "teachers are self-made . . . teachers form themselves and are 'born' into the profession" (p. 451). This myth helps to paint "the portrait of the teacher as rugged individual: if one cannot make the grade, one is not meant to be a teacher" (p. 452). A strong work ethic is implied in this myth and associated with that work, I learned, there should be a monetary reward. Studying at a university

for four years didn't make much sense in this schema. Society, too, promoted this work ethic I learned early in life. As a mother and a student I am engaged in a constant struggle to justify what I do. As a teacher I received a paycheque and that changed everything. There is a lot of power in the statement, "I'm working."

As a student in elementary school my goals were twofold. I was to do well as a student, getting good marks was important. Secondly, I observed and absorbed what it was that teachers do in school. This unquestioning acceptance of what happened in school separated me from many of my friends. My identity was intertwined with the identities of my teachers. Their identity was set in glorified opposition to the powers that be.

The neighbourhood in which I grew up also knew me as a teacher. I had what it took and while I did not know what that phrase entailed there was an implicit meaning that adults understood. My identity was firmly entrenched. I had not yet finished school but my destiny was clear, I would be a teacher.

Schooling Stories

> *For the rugged individual, any context - be it history, race, class, sex, or society - is viewed as a mere handicap to be individually overcome. In this view, the rugged individual becomes competitive and possessive, uninterested in social change and obsessed with getting ahead.*
>
> *Britzman, 1986, p. 453*

Campus life in the decade of the sixties clearly defined the appropriate places of men and women and I did not fight these restraints but rather looked to find my place within the existing structures. I became what Le Guin (1989) referred to as a 'female man.' "They want to buy into the man's world, whatever

the cost. And if that's true desire, not just compulsion born of fear, O.K.; if you can't lick 'em join 'em" (p. 157). I was rejecting the world of my mother and seeking the world of my father, the world of money and power.

But in another way I was accepting my mother's description of her world. "You'll turn out just like me!" was the warning she would issue whenever she wanted to make me mind. A daughter struggles with her sense of her mother's unrealized ambitions, unexpressed talents; she strives for a place in her father's world to compensate her mother for her disappointments by achieving what was denied to her (Chernin cited in Grumet, 1988).

I chose to study in a masculine dominated field within the faculty of education, secondary social studies. This was a deliberate choice. Most women entered elementary education but I saw that choice as nonacademic and therefore lacking the rigor to measure one's mettle as a teacher. I also saw that choice as somewhat matriarchal and I wanted none of that; I wanted a place in the patriarchal power structure.

In my second year of study I was chosen as a student teaching partner by A. because, as he later explained, I would make him look good. This explanation came to light in a heated argument when he realized that this was not to be. I was not the weak teacher he had expected me to be and he felt duped. We remained friends but he was not my partner for the next round of student teaching.

Throughout my years in university I worked hard and proved myself capable of "receiving, even reproducing knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities" (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 15). This wasn't any different from the

learning style that I had developed during my years at public school. I had measured up to external standards; I was the good student and the successful woman who made it in a man's world (Belenky et al, 1986). My sense of 'self' was embedded in these external definitions. And these understandings were carried into the classroom when I began to teach.

In 1969, I completed a Bachelor of Education degree. This was not entirely my own doing. After two years I wanted to leave and teach, after three years I wanted to leave and teach. Each time, though, I gave into my mother's argument that I must get a degree so that I would have something to fall back on in case my husband died. It wasn't a matter of needing to study those extra years in order to be a better teacher, I had already proved that. It was simply a matter of paying, not with money but with years of study, for an insurance policy.

Beginning Teacher Stories

> *Whatever [university] does not do, it does create a climate where work is demanded and where nearly every student finds him or herself meeting the demands with powers he did not know he had. Then quite suddenly a young woman, if she marries, has to diverge completely from this way of life, while her husband simply goes on toward the goals set in [university]. She is expected to cope not with ideas, but with cooking food, washing dishes, doing laundry, and if she insists on keeping at a job, she needs both a lot of energy and the ability to organize her time. . . . 'The work' she may long to do has been replaced by various kinds of labor for which she has been totally unprepared. She had longed for children let us say, she is deeply in love, she has what she thought she wanted so she suffers guilt and dismay to feel so disoriented. . . . in marrying the wife has suffered an earthquake and the husband has not.*
>
> *Sarton, 1973, p. 92-93*

Upon graduation I signed a teaching contract and moved out of the province

to begin teaching in a large urban center. I arrived there only to find that a job was not immediately available and I would have to supply teach until a position became available. It was bad enough that I didn't know the city, its public transportation system or the province's curricula. In time these obstacles could be overcome. The more pervasive problem was my reception as a member of a secondary social studies department. This problem became a constant in my teaching career.

As a supply teacher I used a journal to release my anxiety about the unknown and my anger at the way I was being treated.

> In-service day so the school board lets me choose the school I'll go to. Well Z is the closest so Z. it was. . . . At seminar time I join the social studies department by introducing myself to the head of the department who didn't seem too concerned about anything except some football film. The dept. is composed of all men who try to convince me to join the English dept. . . . There's this character who is so domineering. Everything is black and white and recordable and everything you say he repeats. And his voice is loud and harsh. If I made any contribution he considered it off the topic. (September 19, 1969, handwritten)

Four months later I did get a teaching position but the stereotyping and expectations were no different, they were just more subtle.

As a beginning teacher I was full of confidence that I had what it took to be a good teacher. I could control my classes and I could teach the required texts. I had spent many years mastering information and I now felt ready to both dispense knowledge (teach) and at the same time provide my students with all the tricks of the trade so that they, too, could master that same information.

This description of teaching resided at some subconscious level and only occasionally was it tested and therefore made manifest. I remember one time when we came upon the term 'high diurnal range.' I was supposed to know all of this

and a feeling of panic swept over me. I recovered quickly, the term became a homework assignment. I would have time to find out myself, because I saw myself as the "conduit" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1992, p. 370) through which passed the accumulated knowledge of the generations. I would not make this mistake again.

As the months and years passed by, my view of knowledge and the need for control did not change but I did develop more personal relationships with some students. This took place outside of the classroom; it was after school that I felt I could relax and be more myself and so could my students.

The vice-principal and I were both members of the social studies team along with our department head. At one of our first meetings he announced to me that his wife was at home where she belonged. When I was away from school he phoned me at home, always on the pretext of some school matter that I had, indeed, looked after but he couldn't seem to find the report or whatever it was he required. I later discovered that he did this to other female teachers and that they had devised elaborate codes so that their husbands could phone home while this nosy, intrusive vice-principal could be ignored.

This school did not have a common staff room. It had separate staff rooms for men and women. Occasionally the vice-principal left his domain and entered ours. On one of his visits he found me lying on a couch. It was obvious from my chalk-like complexion that I was ill, my female colleagues were sympathetic and helpful. Momentarily one of them would be taking me home. She had left only to juggle her timetable with a fellow teacher so that she could, in fact, leave the

school. His sarcastic, disparaging remarks about the fact that I was lying there were met head-on by my clinical and precise description of my medical state. I had momentarily salvaged my dignity. But in the hierarchical power structure of schools he remained in control of the situation and did, in fact, have the final say.

After three years with this school district I was moving to a new city because my husband was making a career change. I asked the principal for a copy of my teacher evaluation knowing that it would be useful as part of my application for another teaching position. When it was ready I went to pick up my copy in his office. The vice-principal was present, which seemed unusual. It no longer seemed unusual when I had had a chance to quickly look over the report. I had been graded as low as they possibly could, any lower and I would have had to be consulted. The part that really hurt was that they had done this without ever once being present in my classroom. They hadn't even talked to me about my teaching. It was clear that the vice-principal had had the final say, my evaluation was meant to put me in my place.

I was moving so there was little time to do anything about this. Furthermore, I was too ashamed to tell anyone what had happened and without some support I felt helpless. This report contradicted the letter of reference I had received from my department head. He not only described my contributions, he valued them. I received a gift from the guidance counsellor for all the work I had done for the students; he told me that I had made a difference.

I thought I could overcome being female by being successful in a masculine field. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em'" may sound like the answer but no one ever

adds that they may not want you and what then? You keep this to yourself because to do otherwise is to appear as a failure. I had been devastated by the events I described and kept wondering what was wrong with me. I had wanted this career so much but I couldn't overcome the feeling of failure. I had no intention of applying for another teaching position even though I had received a positive letter of reference from another principal who had been in the school during my second year of teaching.

I stayed home to be a wife. It was a lonely existence. I did not discuss my feelings with anyone and a sense of failure came to reside in my bones. Eventually, I decided to search out some other kind of work. For a short time I worked in another field but the pay was minimal and the work mind-numbing. I also spent a semester back at university to work on a Bachelor of Arts degree. Before a new career plan came to fruition my husband was transferred.

I continued in the role of housewife. Sadly, I suffered a miscarriage and the state of my mental health deteriorated. The guilt associated with this miscarriage was overwhelming. What had I done wrong? Try as I might I could not reason my way through this; a woman's body operates beyond the reaches of intellect. When I finally accepted my inability to control what had happened and even the medical community's inability to control what had happened, I could finally get on with my life.

In the meantime, at the urging of my physician, I applied for a teaching position. She reasoned that a job was the answer to my problems, it would help me to overcome my feelings. I had halfheartedly applied to teach when we moved to

this new city because the cost of living was so high, but there had been few jobs available and not one for me. When I inquired a second time I was offered a job full of possibility. I was hired because I was a woman. This social studies department was comprised of women only and they wanted to keep it that way. It was exciting to meet with them and plan the coming school year. But before the school year commenced my husband was transferred and once again we moved to a new city. I was so disappointed but there was no serious discussion about whether or not we should move. He was the breadwinner. My work was filler. This tacit understanding of our roles had never been challenged by either one of us.

I did get another teaching job as soon as we moved. This school housed kindergarten through grade nine and the presence of both an elementary and a secondary teaching staff helped me to restructure my understanding of what it meant to be a teacher. I existed, along with my fellow special education teachers, in a kind of no-man's land. We didn't belong to either staff, we were a community unto ourselves.

My initial placement was with a junior high school special education class. Nothing had prepared me for this and it wasn't long before I was tendering my resignation. These students vandalized my car, used the telephone to harass me, stole from me, jumped out of second storey windows and in other less dramatic ways made my life miserable. After two years away from teaching this was a terrible shock that only served to reinforce my feelings of inadequacy. Rather than accept my resignation, the principal convinced me to take another special education class, this time with younger children.

My class was made up of nine students and it was clear from the very beginning that I would have to change if I hoped to make any headway with these students. Like the previous class they had nothing to lose and I had everything to lose. Herein lies the beginning of a process that carries on to this day.

Much of what I learned in that classroom was the result of my responses to the students' needs. They needed to talk, not about curricular matters but about themselves. Their need was so great that it became a regular part of our day. I was included in this conversation. My stories were important too. I was giving up some of my control, they were setting the classroom agenda but the resulting sense of community provided a new way of thinking about control. Never before had I spent all day with a group of students. The fluidity and flexibility of the day were like new toys to me. I continually played around with these factors. There was no set curriculum, each teacher had the responsibility of figuring out a program of studies to meet the needs of these children and each one of us did it differently. Our classrooms were very much a reflection of who were. These differences did, at times, pose a problem but at the same time we were united in our need for support and this always overcame the differences.

Had I found my place as a teacher? The administrative staff approved of the work that I was doing. The staff was supportive. I felt comfortable in this setting, it suited me as much as it suited the children. It was a beginning. After two years I left this position on maternity leave and eventually resigned so that I could be a full-time mother.

Mothering Stories

> *Women must remember and articulate the experience of child nurture so that we can bring what we know from the complex, sustained, and exciting labor of child care into the intellectual structures of the disciplines and the methods of pedagogy.*
> *Grumet, 1988, p. 99-100*

It is the birth of my children that has, more that anything else, helped me to begin a process of understanding and unifying my 'self.' The landscape of my life is littered with images of who I tried to be; one image eventually replacing another. Miller (1986) spoke of a fragmented sense of herself as "partly the manifestation of my struggle to identify the constructed realities of others, which I falsely had identified as my own" (p. 113). I, too, never learned to draw a line between the inner and outer spaces of my life. This sense of fragmentation lingers to this day.

Our culture has created the roles of mother and teacher as dichotomous. "The cultural images of mother are less clearly delineated but seem to express the mirror images of the teacher. The notion is that there is need for strong teachers when mothers are perceived as being less than adequate" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 62). This is not my reality, nor could I bracket these roles and play them out only at the appropriate times. They overlapped and left me in need of a new understanding of myself as a mother/teacher. It is narrative inquiry that provided me with the opportunity to explore a more holistic picture of who I am and who I am becoming. In the process of telling and retelling my stories there may emerge new possibilities for schooling. I am hopeful.

When my first daughter was born I was led back to my inner space. In reliving my own childhood experiences in the context of my child's experiences,

my voice, long silenced, began to surface. The voice that I was slowly recovering spoke a language different than the one I had learned at school and used as a teacher. This was a language of the particular, a language rooted in the daily experience of living. Knowledge was no longer objectified, I came to know through this mother-daughter relationship.

I became reacquainted with sensual knowing. Our communication was through the skin. It is difficult to put into words the visceral connection I felt, emotions, raw and unnerving, welling inside me. It is the first and only time that I have felt capable of killing another human being, so strong was the urge to protect my child when strangers entered the yard. It was also a time of unconditional, loving acceptance.

We became partners in a journey of discovery. I was caught up in my daughter's wonder about the world around her. Her discoveries delighted her and her questions were asked with a sense of urgency. We did a lot of talking and I was caught up in her quest to find out about the world around her. She showed me how natural it was to question, to hypothesize, to wonder, to learn. It was her way of being in the world. My experience of the mother-child relationship was different than my experience of the student-teacher, teacher-student relationship. I didn't 'teach' her anything and yet she learned so much. Egan (1986) described children as "active, and capable of enormous and easy learning in the informal settings of everyday experience. If we attend to the ways children learn in their daily lives outside of school, we can devise ways of organizing the curriculum to enhance their learning in school" (p. 105). My questions about these differences surfaced as

soon as my daughter entered school.

What I learned here helped me to restory my own life. My way of being in the world changed drastically when I became a mother. But unsupported I could not continue to ignore the messages that bombarded the walls of our home. My immersion in bodily knowing, this primary experience of connectedness, gave way to societal dictates about good mothering. By the time my second daughter was born I was determined to live the image of 'super mother' that had been constructed by others. I lost confidence in my emerging sense of 'self.'

I remember dressing carefully to attend my first parents meeting at the local school. My daughter was starting kindergarten and I wanted everything to be perfect. I was excited about this 'beginning.' School had been a great experience for me and I thought my child would tell her story the way that I told mine. I wasn't even conscious of this until I realized that it was not to be. I could not ignore or pretend away the difficulties that she encountered as she began school. Walls had been erected around her learning and she could not slow down to the pace and structure of school. This was my child and her pain was real. It became my pain too. I talked to her teacher about the problems that had arisen. One of her comments to me was that I should understand, I was a teacher. At that moment I realized that I was more mother than teacher. This was my child. We lived day and night with this reality. Please do something! I was powerless to help.

This process of restorying also came to include my second daughter. Their lived experiences are shared with me and their stories reside in my head and my heart. Our relationships and their experiences with schooling accompanied me as I

returned to teaching. I am a mother who is also a teacher.

These attempts at making sense of my children's experiences pulled me into an examination of the stories I had told about my own experiences as a student. I had engaged in a process called "narrative smoothing"; I had created a story in which everything worked out well in the end (Spence cited in Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 10). Any problems I had at school, I had been told, were my fault. I was so much younger than the other students. I didn't try hard enough. "Propelled by the belief that the individual is responsible for what is in fact a product of complex social circumstances, the ideology of blaming the victim ignores the influence of social relationships and historical progression" (Britzman, 1986, p. 453). This is the ideology that medicates children so that they are able to attend school. Both as a teacher and a mother I have had to deal with this issue and while I am repulsed by the idea of sedating children, I feel powerless to stop it. Postpone it, perhaps, but not stop it.

It is this feeling of powerlessness that makes me feel like a conspirator against my children as I send them on their way to school. For I, through my work as mother, student, and teacher, have contributed my labour and my children to institutions that have extended my own subordination and contradicted my own experiences of nurturance; to be oppressed is to be oppressive (Grumet, 1988).

Stories of Re-educating a Mother/Teacher

> *Female students are systematically informed that they have a sphere, that it is limited and they are limited. Marriage and motherhood are seen as central in that sphere, and neither marriage nor motherhood is seen as an aid or an advantage for*

> *paid employment. It is almost an absurd idea to suggest that a woman might get married and that this might help her in her paid job - but it is not at all absurd in relation to a man; despite the fact that both are human, both may be equally able, both married, and both wanting to work, both wanting to be independent individuals. Employment is seen as integral to male identity but peripheral to female, and marriage and parenthood as integral to female identity but peripheral to male, and education both reflects and creates this belief.*
>
> *Spender, 1982, p. 104*

I returned to university in 1989. This decision came out of discussions I had within the personnel department of the school district where I had taught before my children were born. In order to return to teaching they suggested that I take particular courses to prepare me for working with special education students in elementary schools. The euphoria of doing something significant with the second half of my life was quickly drowned by the continual onslaught of information received through lectures. I studied continuously. It took four months before my body caved in to these assaults and sought sleep, no matter the hour or location. But I had proved to myself that I could do this, I could succeed as a student and so I continued taking courses.

At the same time I was also experiencing something new, learning had taken on a highly personal dimension. Whatever paper or project I was involved with I related directly to the experiences of my own children and sometimes to my own experiences of schooling. I could not separate our 'selves' from what I was learning and the intensity of experiencing learning in this way meant that I rode an emotional rollercoaster every semester. Sometimes I was blaming myself, sometimes I was angry with the system of schooling, sometimes I felt guilty, sometimes I was pleased. What had happened to me? I had lost all objectivity.

Learning had become emotional and as a result of those emotions, very messy. "Truth, for subjective knowers, is an intuitive reaction-something experienced, not thought out, something felt rather than actively pursued or constructed" (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 69). For the first time I was creating a space for the growth of 'self.'

The diploma didn't help me secure a teaching position. I supply taught but I did not enjoy this kind of work. Meaningful engagement with students was limited and the role itself came with all kinds of implicit beliefs that I did not want to deal with every time I went to another school. A fellow student secured a teaching position. She was divorced and prepared to move, which is exactly what she did in order to get work and support her family. I was envious.

I applied to continue studying in the master's program. This was the first time I made a personal, conscious choice for teaching. I didn't have to do this. No one was requiring this of me. In fact, most people who questioned my decision inquired as to why I was bothering. But the more I studied the more I realized what I did not know. What was most unsettling was that the biggest unknown was myself. I look back to my journals and papers and see the constant presence of two questions, who am I and who am I becoming. I had been turned on my head, in a manner of speaking, and spent this year of study trying to turn myself right side up. I explored many educational issues in the light of my own life but I was always left with a sense of unfinished business. It was the writing of Gilligan et al (1990) and Noddings (1984) which helped me root out the fundamental questions which my earlier musings had missed. Who am I as a woman? How has being female shaped my life? And how will the answers to these questions shape my future?

After this introduction to feminist thinking I had the opportunity to explore my ways of thinking and being through a journal I kept during a curriculum course. Jean Clandinin responded to my writing and it was her sensitivity to my struggle that helped me to enlarge upon the issues that I wanted to explore. This 'learning path' has been a most productive one for me. I no longer felt isolated, alone with my thoughts. With understanding has come anger. I am angry because of the way my existence has been denied, driven underground, and forgotten. I am angry, too, that I, like many other women, have become a player in the denial of my 'self.' But as Greene (1983) stated, "where there is rage, there is always possibility" (p. 193).

Chapter 3

Making Connections

My literature review served to validate my experiences and provide the basis for understanding those experiences. I needed to know that there were ways of discussing what I was experiencing. I needed to find a language that spoke to me and of me.

Olsen's (1961) story "I Stand Here Ironing" was the first story I read. It is the story that every teacher should hear and every mother should tell about the children who people our lives. There is so much we do not know about one another, teachers, mothers, and children, and our deaf ears create a chasm that can not be crossed.

Olsen wrote as a mother and this presents a problem. Who is listening? The voices of mothers have been silenced, what they have to say lacks the academic rigor to count for much. Yet I cannot forget her story, it has seeped into my being. So, too, has the writing of Grumet (1988) who acknowledged that her children both interrupted her work and made it possible. She wrote Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching (1988, p. xv) "to remember, imagine, and realize ways of knowing and being that can span the chasm presently separating our public and private worlds." How they felt about their role as a mother mattered to these writers. They validated the connections I was making between mothering and teaching.

But what about my ways of knowing and being? Why hadn't I made these connections between mothering and teaching before my own children entered

school? What had changed? How could I come to some understanding of my 'learning paths?' Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986); Gilligan, Lyons and Hanmer (1990); and Noddings (1984) wrote about women's ways of knowing and being. They listened to women and developed a new language to provide a framework for women's 'self' understanding. They shed new light on morality so that it may be understood in the context of our relationships with others.

Historically, the silence of women was first broken by women writers. From Heilbrun (1988, 1990) I learned about the writing of Sarton (1979) and Woolf (1929, 1938, 1984). I saw myself; I was reading about my own struggles. It was an exhilarating experience to be able to connect on both an intellectual and emotional level with what I was reading. Why had I not read the writing of these women before? Le Guin (1989) is another writer who spoke to me in the same way. Her writing articulated both the sense of importance I felt about my work as a mother and also the outrage I felt at the treatment I have received for being who I am. All of this writing grounded me in the sense that it validated my feelings and gave me the strength to pursue my thesis work. But the question remained, how had this happened to women?

In a sense all of the writers I mentioned, in some way, helped to answer that question. Yet I could not address the issue of the silence of women without addressing the issue of the reasons for that silence. Stone (1988) looked at how our family stories shape us. Spender (1982) examined how our schooling has shaped us. Dooley, Graham, Koenen and College (1988-89) outlined how philosophical traditions have shaped the conceptualization of what it is to be a

woman. Miller (1976) wrote about the forces that act on and in women in order to arrive at a new psychological understanding of our lives. Lightfoot (1978) described the cultural stereotyping of mothers and teachers. The negation of women's experiences and their continued oppression is to be found in these stereotypes. Britzman (1986) analyzed the common myths of our culture that are embedded in our stories of ourselves as teachers.

All of this reading helped to inform my thesis work but how would that thesis be shaped? How could I remain true to my yearning for 'self' understanding and at the same time write a thesis about schooling? It was in the writing of Clandinin and Connelly (1992, forthcoming) and Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1990) that I was able to find a synthesis of all that I was trying to do. Narrative inquiry would allow me to write my own story. Their understanding of curriculum as life's journey made narrative inquiry more than a methodology. It is a way of being in the world, a way of situating oneself at the center so that one's 'self' both frames and becomes the research. I would be able to tell the story of my return to teaching and at the same time make sense of it through a feminist/moral perspective.

The image of myself as a teacher that I described in my narrative beginnings no longer served the person I had become, yet it was deeply embedded in my 'self' understanding. This was painfully clear in my first month of teaching. I just couldn't measure up. This experience dictated to me the importance of understanding my past. Nor could I live the dichotomy that society dictates I should, mother outside school, teacher inside school. The overlap created messiness in my life and I was left wondering, who am I? I needed to develop a

holistic sense of what it means to be a mother and a teacher. Telling the story of my return to teaching would allow me to do that. Past and present would come together so that I might imagine a future.

Coles (1989), Bateson (1990), Dillard (1987) and Paley (1979, 1984, 1988, 1990) are storytellers and I read their stories. They tell the stories of their work and their lives and sometimes the lives of others and at the same time develop new insights about what it means to be a human being, a child, a woman, a teacher. What they have to say is grounded in their own experiences. Not only did I learn from their writing, it also served as an example of what it was that I wanted to do.

Greene (1983, 1986) expanded upon narrative inquiry in her call for multiple narratives in our classrooms. In this light my thesis work became a tool of empowerment. The experience of writing and understanding my story would help me to redefine my ideas about what it means to be learner.

All of these writers had much to say about women's experiences and more specifically about the experiences of teaching and mothering. I read them because I connected in a fundamental way with what they had to say. In my writing I will make these connections so that you, the reader, and I , the writer, will better understand my story. I want to contextualize this knowing; I want it to be manifested in a concrete rather than an abstract form.

> The language of the mother recognizes difference, but resists establishing hierarchy, it glories in the concrete and the specific, valuing the personal and the particular over the kinds of generalizations that can be mounted to subsume them. Perhaps one

> of its chief virtues is its recognition of human limitation, an awareness much needed these days. (Dooley et al, 1988-89, p. 22)

This literature review served, then, to provide a broad schema for understanding my process of coming to know. Reading served as both an experience of consciousness raising and as an affirmation of thoughts and feelings. Mothers who are teachers do tell their stories about what it means to teach and how it is that mothering and teaching come together in their lives. But these stories are told in the private rather than the public domain. We have told our stories to those we trust and we do not trust a culture that oppresses women and affixes terminology to our experiences that makes what we know unknown and foreign to us. Living in this other language has created a constant turmoil in our lives, turmoil that is difficult to rise above. I have an opportunity now, through research, to work through the turmoil. I am willing to take the risk because I have found a caring community of colleagues who support me in my work.

Chapter 4

My Research Journeys

My research story was told in two parts. There was the first story of how I envisioned my research work prior to beginning my writing and there was the second story of how I experienced my research as I engaged in writing about and making sense of my work. Altogether, this was another part of the continual restorying that is a part of my life.

All of this writing was done after I had left the classroom. How I envisioned my research was an understanding I had constructed before I listened to and transcribed my tape recordings.

Once I had listened to and typed out my tape recordings I experienced a dilemma. I now possessed a copy of my journal and in many ways I felt that the journal itself told my story. Was that enough? I started to write, but how would I write? Urgency and excitement were replaced by postponement and doubt.

And so I revisited my ideas about narrative inquiry. I talked to my colleagues about this dilemma. And I wrote again about narrative inquiry and called that my experience of research. This understanding of narrative inquiry was contextualized within the dilemma I was living, a dilemma centered in the meanings that I was constructing from my journal.

My envisioned research focussed on the morality of my work. My experienced research focussed on the critique of my work. Both of these passages were written in the present tense. In both stories there was an immediacy to my

writing that I did not want to lose and therefore I have left them as I wrote them. We are continually engaged in constructing and reconstructing our stories, in restorying.

Envisioning My Research

> *How after all, can one experience deny, negate, disprove, another experience? . . . **your** experience is your truth. How can one being prove another being wrong? . . . **my** being is my truth. I can offer it; you don't have to take it. People can't contradict each other, only words can: words separated from experience for use as object, exposing and exploiting the object but disguising and defending the subject.*
>
> *Le Guin, 1989, p. 150-151*

So it is that as I begin to tell my story, my struggle for 'self' understanding both frames and becomes my research. In the context of schooling, this ever expanding 'self' understanding will give voice to new ways of situating myself in a classroom. It brings into the foreground the morality of my work as a teacher.

The difficulty in telling my story is that I continue to live it. "A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). What happens each day intertwines with the story I am trying to write, that part of my experience that I am symbolically "killing" (Dooley et al, 1988-89, p. 21) to make it a part of public discourse. Our lives are not static. The difficulty of writing my story is that each day brings with it a slightly altered focus, the lens through which I view my life is constantly changing, sometimes imperceptibly sometimes not. Any story I tell serves as a beginning, as a starting point for the continual cycle of retelling my stories and living my life. To engage in narrative inquiry, then, is to engage in multilayered REsearch (Berthoff, 1987).

"REsearch, like REcognition, is a REflexive act. It means looking and looking again" (p. 30). As Grumet (1987) explained research, it is "a hermeneutic circle of the soul, ever enlarging its self-story" (p. 323).

"Narrative is a central function of language. Not, in origin, an artifact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story" (Le Guin, 1989, p. 39). This fundamental human process of storying and restorying names the act of living as an act of research.

My engagement in narrative inquiry is also a form of meta-research, it is a process of experiencing new relationships, new ways of being teacher-student, student-teacher. Greene (1986) described the inclusive nature of this relationship as

> . . . teachers learning along with those we try to provoke to learn, [so that] we may be able to inspire hitherto unheard voices. We may be able to empower people to rediscover their own memories and articulate them in the presence of others, whose space they can share. Such a project demands the capacity to unveil and disclose. It demands the exercise of imagination, enlivened by works of art, by situations of speaking and making. (p. 441)

At present I am the 'hitherto unheard voice' but I am not unaware of the process that I am undertaking along with my mentor to bring that unheard voice into the realm of public discourse. "Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). Just as my knowing is grounded in my living so is the knowing of my students grounded in

their own lives. This research in which I am engaged is empowering me so that I will know in an intellectual, emotional, and moral way how it is that we reach out towards becoming "persons among other persons" (Greene, 1986, p. 440). How does it feel to speak publicly in one's own voice? How does it feel to be trusted as a learner? Through what process does that trust develop? Who and what has helped me to make sense of my stories?

My classroom was like the one Miller (1986) described, "we dance around one another, close but not touching yet, wanting the connections, but waiting to reveal just how much. It's always the same in the beginning, and it's the real work of my classroom" (p. 11). Clark (1991) listed what he considered to be the basic needs of children and one of those needs is the need "to be known" (p. 14). For me this has been a lifelong need. The need to be known may be reconsidered as the need to be known by oneself and the need to be known by others. These needs are complementary. Only when I know myself can I truly be known by others. How do we move beyond the labels-behaviour disordered, truant, student, teacher? How is the need to be known reflected in my classroom, how does it become a part of my teaching? For me, narrative is a beginning. It becomes the dance, it provides the opportunity for both closeness and connection.

My voice in this story is always questioning, often weak because of fatigue and illness, sometimes disillusioned even angry, and occasionally sparkling with the remembrance of a special moment when students and teacher were truly engaged in learning. What is important is that the voice in this story continues to be my own. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) cited Britzman to describe voice as

> . . . attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all a part of this process. Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process. (p. 4)

It is my hope that this story will also make a space for children's voices, both my students' and my own children's, because the meanings that I construct of my experience are shaped in relationships. I do not know how my students will tell their stories of being in Mrs. Kennedy's grade four class but my knowing is contextual and so their voices must also be heard.

As the story unfolds I want to "burrow" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 11), to pay particular attention to events' emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities. Why is it that an event is associated with a particular feeling and why might I have felt as I did?

Belenky et al (1986) described a morality of responsibility and care because for women, morality, mind, self, and relationships are intricately linked in everyday ways of knowing and learning. Lyons (1990) defined morality as "responsiveness to another" (p. 41). Noddings (1984) described morality as an ethic of caring, based upon "human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for" (p. 1). The emotional and moral dimensions of one's 'self' image are the "glue which binds together the educational and personal private sides of an individual's life" (Clandinin, 1986, p. 131). I have yet to talk publicly about teaching as a moral act

and it is through 'burrowing' that I can make morality a part of the public discourse about teaching.

It is through my experiences of schooling and the experiences of my children that I have come to believe, like Clark (1991), that the responses to a person's needs

> . . . are the educational events that changed and shaped [her] life. These are the facts and cases and feelings that [she] shall remember long after the algebra and the chemistry are forgotten. These are the little moments when mental health hangs in the balance. (p. 15)

The mother's voice (Noddings, 1984) will be heard. The "(m)other tongue" (Dooley et al, 1988-89, p. 21) is the language I will use to tell my story; the (m)other tongue "resists generalization and abstraction; it is hostile to categories and hierarchies; it endorses limitation, not grandiosity; it focuses on the concrete realities of actual human interaction" (p. 21). It is a language of the particular, rooted in experience. I spent twelve years at home with my children and they brought me full circle, back to the language I had spoken as a child.

> It is language always on the verge of silence and often on the verge of song. It is the language stories are told in. It is the language spoken by all children and most women, and so I call it the mother tongue, for we learn it from our mothers and speak it to our kids. (Le Guin, 1989, p. 150)

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) also discussed the importance of language in constructing a narrative.

> We need a language that will permit us to talk about ourselves in situations and that will also let us tell stories of our experience . . . a language close to experience, a language of affect, morality, and aesthetics. It is a language of images, personal philosophy, rules, practical principles, rhythms, metaphors, and narrative unity. . . . [We] mean an embodied language. It is also the syntax and semantics of our bodily movement, manipulation, and activity. (p. 59-60)

While this is my story the sense I make of it will be a collaborative effort. Clandinin and Connelly (forthcoming) wrote about awakenings.

> We imagine that it is through a felt moment of awareness with the way we are making sense of our world, of how we are living and telling our stories, that lead us to what we call here awakening. This felt moment of awareness may not be one moment in time but may be more of an ongoing sense of unease, a sense of unease as we recognize that our way of living and telling our stories is not the best way or a sense of unease as we recognize that others have other ways of living and telling their stories, stories that might be possibilities for our lives. (p. 7)

Greene (1974) stated her belief that "this kind of awakening can still occur in schools, at least where there are teachers who no longer lead mechanical lives. Having themselves experienced what it means to be aroused to weariness and amazement, they have to think of ways of awakening others" (p. 75).

As a mother I often seek out a 'kindred spirit' to listen to my stories and help me make sense of the relationships that I have with my daughters. But teaching has always been, for me, a lonely profession. There was a risk involved in telling my story and that risk, the risk of appearing as a failure, overrode my need for a 'kindred spirit' to help me make sense of my teaching.

In a curriculum course, taken immediately prior to my return to work, I shared some of my stories for the first time. There were two other members in my group and we had studied together for some time before we shared what we had written. Their responses to my story were truly enlightening. I had not thought of the larger issues involved in my story, of other possibilities that could be seen in my work with this particular child. That story had resided in my subconscious for fourteen years and in moments of doubt and anxiety about my abilities as a teacher and a mother that story always managed to surface and haunt me. Now I was offered other possibilities, I had experienced an 'awakening.'

When I returned to work I again felt isolated, afraid to share my stories and so I kept them to myself. I was conscious of the fact, however, that this was of my own doing. My past experiences as a teacher and more importantly my understanding of those experiences stood in the way of any kind of connected teaching. The pressure to maintain some kind of stability in my life mounted as more and more I felt overwhelmed by the reality of returning to teaching. The school administrators sensed my 'unease' and provided me with opportunities to discuss my work both with themselves and another teacher and with social workers involved in the lives of the children with whom I was working. Herein lies the

beginning of my 'awakening'; in listening to others tell their stories I realized new possibilities for my own story. It was as if the dam had burst. It felt good to laugh again, to see the foibles of my classroom as just that, not judgement calls on my ability to teach.

These feelings of unease followed by awakenings became part of the cycle of my teaching. I am sure that the cultural differences between myself and my students heightened these feelings. But it was also true that I easily reverted to my previous image of myself as a teacher and then I couldn't possibly measure up. I was now a mother who taught and in order to work out a new understanding of myself as a teacher I was required (forced by my inability to get it all together) to engage in a ongoing dialogue with my colleagues, to talk with them about what it meant to teach these children in this school at this time in my life. This enabled me to survive and eventually thrive.

Another layer of interpretation will be added to the story as I write it because writing does not quiet the mind to further interpretation. Rather, writing the story will act as a catalyst for further interpretation and I will reach out to colleagues and my mentor for help in making sense of the story I am telling. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) named this reconstruction; "[t]hrough reflection it is possible to reconstruct, to rebuild a narrative that 'remakes' the taken-for-granted, habitual ways we all have of responding to our curriculum situations" (p. 81).

Bateson (1990) described the lives of the women about whom she wrote as "lives in flux, lives still indeterminate and subject to further discontinuities" (p. 29). She could be describing me. My teaching contract was a temporary one and I was

not deemed to be the most suitable candidate for a teaching position that became available and for which I had applied. So once again I feel defensive whenever I am asked, "Are you working?" or in these so-called enlightened times, "Do you work outside the home?" I struggle daily with the unspoken thoughts behind these questions. I struggle to make sense of what my life means and so I write.

As a mother I am never far away from schools even though I no longer work in one. The external picture of who I am has changed, once again, but not the internal picture. But it is important to acknowledge that I write my story against this backdrop of discontinuity. I have spent a lifetime looking for my place in society. Heilbrun (1988) wrote,

> women have lived too much with closure: . . . 'if I get this work accepted, if I get that job'—there always seems to loom the possibility of something being over, settled, sweeping clear the way for contentment. This is the delusion of a passive life. When the hope for closure is abandoned, when there is an end to fantasy, adventure for women will begin. (p. 130)

For me, this thesis work is the beginning of that adventure. I can accept Bateson's (1990) statement that "[c]omposing a life involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present" (p. 29-30). It is alright to be in this place. The question is, simply, how am I making sense of it?

Too much is lost when we are asked to bracket parts of our lives, to somehow put aside our experiences. This is what schools ask of children and women. Schools exist as institutions unbounded by human experience, as

somehow beyond this realm, and yet the very individuals who people these institutions are bounded by their experiences. Children enter these schools with their primary experience being that of the nurturing mother (caregiver)-child relationship. This is their reality but it is most often ignored. Indeed, it is my job as a teacher to prepare these children for the 'real' world. In Nodding's (1984) language that would be the masculine world. These children need to 'grow up', to become strong, silent and independent workers. It is a solitary and competitive road they must walk to take their place in the 'real' world.

> We are told that we are preparing the next generation of factory workers, scientists, and managers, to compete in an unforgiving economic Olympics. Only the brightest, most ruthlessly driven will survive, thrive, and taste sweet victory, we are told. Yet, paradoxically, the harder we drive for these laurels, the more elusive individual happiness, cultural stability, and social and mental health become. (Clark, 1991, p. 11)

As a teacher, I always speak of the needs and interests of the child as paramount, yet these are often in conflict with the demands of the curriculum. Why is this so? Curriculum reflects a masculine view of an objectified world (Noddings, 1984). We maintain this standard at a terrible price and that price is dehumanization.

It is this paradox into which a mother is drawn, at least once, when she enrolls her child in school. It is visible on the faces of my children who are called on year after year to mold themselves to a system that perpetuates objectified knowing. Their sense of themselves is soon overwhelmed by their sense of

themselves as students.

It is this paradox that I am trying to explore in my thesis work. I am a mother who teaches and a teacher who is also a mother. I will no longer accept the compartmentalization of my life. Perhaps I never could and that created the turmoil of my life, the mental anguish of having to make decisions as a mother or a teacher when, in fact, my thinking was that of a mother/teacher.

How can we imagine new ways of schooling? Perhaps it is by looking at the lives of those individuals who people schools. Listen to their wealth of stories, of how it is they make sense of their daily lives. And as we listen it is possible to 'awaken' to new possibilities. As Bateson (1990) listened to and interpreted the stories of women she concluded that

> . . . [w]omen's lives offer valuable models because of the very pressures that make them seem more difficult. Women have not been permitted to focus on single goals but have tended to live with ambiguity and multiplicity. It's not easy. But the rejection of ambiguity may be a rejection of the complexity of the real world in favor of some dangerously simple competitive model. . . . Women, torn between their own creative energies and concern for each member of their families, are reminded daily that role stereotypes and balance sheets are equally inadequate tools for seeking long-term well-being. (p. 184)

Gloria Steinem (1983) wrote about her mother's life and entitled the essay, "Ruth's Song (Because She Could Not Sing It)." We have not been taught to sing

our songs, to tell our stories. Belenky et al (1986) state that "[a]ll women grow up having to deal with historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood-one common theme being that women, like children, should be seen and not heard" (p. 5). We learned instead to turn our anger inward and engage in self-doubt and self-blame. That silence has cost women dearly. I am no longer willing to pay the price of silence. So I begin now to sing, to laugh, to cry, to tell my story.

Experiencing My Research

> *As chroniclers of our own stories, we write to create ourselves, to give voice to our experiences, to learn who we are and who we have been. Our diaries become the stories of our journeys through life, stories that are both instructive and transforming in the telling and the listening. These stories, these myriad voices, then serve to instruct and transform society, to add to the collective voice we call culture. Diarists, then, both as researchers and research subjects, begin to heal themselves and the split society has created between subject and object. Thus diaries, these small, insignificant objects filled with the simple words of our lives, can serve to make us whole.*
>
> *Cooper, 1991, p. 111*

The pace of my writing is sporadic and even within those periods when the words come easily and fill the computer screen there are often interruptions. Quietly I close the door of the room where I work but my children read this gesture differently than I, they enter and seek the solace or answers for which they cannot wait. These interruptions can grow into something that takes me away from my writing. At times I am overwhelmed.

The interruptions I plan do not overwhelm me but they often depress me. It

is difficult to care for oneself and others and still find time to write. Often the laundry is forgotten or a pot left untended as my thoughts swell into some kind of formulation that demands recording. The toll is exacting when, later on, I look around this house and realize all that I have not done in order to write. Still, it must be that my need to write, to make sense, is the greater need. I know that I will be returning to the classroom; I feel a sense of urgency to figure out how I have constructed my image of myself in the classroom. If I do not make the time to understand my 'self', to begin this journey, I am afraid that it will overwhelm me and I will leave teaching as I did many years ago, voiceless and in pain. This 'self' construction is an ongoing process and as I restory the past I am ever mindful of the future because what I am doing here will become the foundation of my work in the classroom.

The words of my journal speak to my need to begin this journey of constructing and reconstructing my 'self.'

> . . . she [a colleague] was offered a contract and she took it and she lasted, I think, two and a half weeks . . . it's so difficult to take over [during] a year. She said enough is enough and she walked out . . . we were talking about the difficulty of returning to work after being at home for so long. . . . She's so firm in her belief that it's not her, it's those children. . . . And I thought to myself, I don't ever have that attitude. . . . I can't stand firm and blame the children or the school. I always look to myself. (Journal, February 11, 1991, p. 59)

The work of my thesis is to negotiate a new understanding. I need to better understand myself and the children with whom I work, remembering all the time that we are situated in a societal context that has shaped much of our understanding. It is restorying through narrative inquiry that has provided the space for negotiating

this new understanding. I have discovered an irony in my teaching that addressed the need for restorying more directly.

> I always feel so responsible for what happens . . . I feel like such a failure. . . . I'll feel so bad and yet how much of this is my responsibility? I mean how much am I supposed to be responsible for? I certainly don't take credit completely for all the successes, I know who's helped me to achieve those successes. I didn't do it alone. So conversely I should be able to say that . . . the failure falls on more shoulders than my own. But it's something I have to battle continually. (Journal, June 3, 1991, p. 139)

This proved to be self-defeating and part of my story of returning to teaching is a gradual (and necessary) reaching out to make sense of my work in the classroom.

> I felt for the first time a sense of community as teachers rallied to support me. I, in turn, opened up. I had not done that before. I kept everything inside and paid, and still am paying, a terrible price—stress, anxiety. But there seemed so many expectations of me. . . . And I played up to these expectations by being seen and not heard. (Journal, January 19, 1991, handwritten)

> . . . perhaps it was just that not having taught for so long my confidence level was pretty low and maybe I thought I'd struck out. But in fact, you see, I didn't give it enough time, I was too hard on myself as my mother always tells me. I expected too much too soon and I find now there's a world of difference in my relations with the staff but also the students' relations with me. And I have to keep thinking not just of them [the students] but of me because I think that it's [forming communities] a human process . . . it's not just teacher-student and we have to kind of think of it in the bigger context. (Journal, January 26, 1991, p. 43)

Narrative inquiry is not a linear work with a beginning and an end. Stories are nested within stories. Stories allow us to move backward and forward in time from a place at the centre, our present reality. The circularity of narrative both embraces my reality and, at the same time, sets me free from that reality. As a research methodology for teachers this understanding is vital. Both aspects of narrative are critical. We cannot move to what could be until we can give voice to

both what is and to an understanding of what is. I do not tell my story simply to be heard, I tell my story to be understood. It is the points of connection between the teller and the listener that provide fertile ground for restorying. This was an ongoing dilemma in my teaching because schools are not places structured for the sharing of teachers' stories. There were powerful moments of connection, to be sure, but nothing that was sustained by the structure itself. Classroom walls serve as more than physical barriers. Each time I left the classroom I had already begun to decontextualize my story, its meaning had begun to change. Teachers do share their stories, and the listeners do make their own connections. But in the 'busy'ness of a school day there is no time for sustained conversation, no time to 'burrow', no time to look beyond the story itself.

As I construct my narrative the layers of my research continue to multiply. My research methodology has become increasingly complex. It no longer seems simply a matter of telling my story. My narrative is nested within my ideas about the nature of research itself, the issues of power and language, and my understanding of the purpose of schools. Embedded in all of these considerations and underlying my work are the issues of morality and gender. As a woman, long silenced, I want to offer new possibilities for work in classrooms.

Language, itself, "can oppress or empower, domesticate or liberate, reproduce or transform" (Dillon, 1987, p. 135). Narrative inquiry, restorying, is helping me to 'see' the oppressive, domestic, reproductive nature of language, the stories told by others that left me feeling that I had no story to tell because there were no points of connection and expansion. Giroux (1984) called for a rethinking

of the language of schooling to "reveal new possibilities for thinking about and organizing school experiences" (p. 34). There are many voices to be heard.

The language that I use to tell my story is deeply rooted in my experiences of mothering. I write in the (m)other tongue, the language of connection. I exist in relation and my thesis is an exploration of those relationships. I want a more holistic 'self' understanding. Language,

> a substitute for the thing itself-a symbolic 'killing' of experience into an 'immortality' of sorts. But while it controls and kills it also connects, and such connections to self, world, and other, have been the primary function of the (m)other tongue, the function of which we now stand most in need (Dooley et al, 1988-89, p. 20)

Schools have traditionally served as an "initiation and immersion into the language of public rhetoric, into discourse and the reality constructed by it" (Dooley et al, 1988-89, p. 19). The purpose of my thesis is to construct a different reality by making the private public. Voiceless, nameless, faceless, women and children have spent much of their lives suffering in the silence created by this public discourse. I wrote about my anger a few years ago and I ended the piece in my journal by writing, "[b]ut I am not finished. What am I to make of all this anger? Something is percolating just below the surface of this anger and I am not sure what it is." I did not recognize the sound of my own voice.

My children have told a parallel story. Initially I had told their stories and they cried out for me to stop. Then I began listening and later paraphrasing their stories and they still cried out for me to stop. Their cries always centered on the

comment, "you never listen to me." And then I realized what it was they wanted me to do, I was to be a listener. Listeners make comments, ask questions and sometimes tell one of their own stories. The listener's responses are the points of connection between the listener and the teller. This is how the story is enlarged. This is how our understanding of our world grows. For my students and myself these points of connection became the foundation upon which we built our community. It was these points of connection where we made our 'selves' known and where we also began to develop a shared story.

I do not want my classroom to be peopled by individuals adrift and alone. I know what it is like to be adrift and alone, that is the essence of my story. And I know the response to that aloneness—anger, volcanic anger, percolating beneath the surface, exploding periodically in what appears to an observer to be random, unexplainable behaviour.

Narrative inquiry has given me power. My anger was fuelled by the stories that have been told secondhand. Someone else has told the story of what it meant to be a mother. Someone else has told the story of what it meant to be a teacher. In Miller's (1987) reconceptualization of research as "what teachers do in their classrooms," she acknowledged the "struggle to understand the nature of research, itself, apart from the dominant paradigm, and to view teaching and research as part of the same processes of meaning-making" (p. 56). As more teachers tell their stories a more authentic picture of what it means to teach will emerge. Multiple narratives are necessary to reflect the reality of the classroom.

Miller (1987) asked the question, ". . . how does a woman gain a sense of

her self both as a woman and as a teacher?" (p. 53). I am heartened by her answer.

> [W]e must create spaces. . . where teachers might examine preunderstandings of their teaching roles, their concepts of self as person and as teacher, and their resulting expectations for themselves and for their students. This opportunity for self-reflexivity is crucial, particularly for women who teach, as means by which they not only might explicate the depth and diversity of their experiences but also might confront and prevent the conceptual replication of teaching as devalued and subservient 'women's work.' (p. 53)

I live narratively. Hence, I am doing something that is, for me, authentic. Stories, "yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (Coles, 1989, p. 30). Narrative provides the space for each one of us to engage collaboratively in research. This is an important point in educational research where the issue of power silently underscores much of the work.

My story weaves back and forth between home and school, between my own children and the children in my classroom. Children are teachers' primary partners in the school setting and for those women who mother they are a primary partner in the home setting.

> . . .most feminist and traditional knowledge has remained deeply and unreflectively centered around the experiences of adults. But, through examining the parallels between children's situations and

> those of women, by gaining clarity about ideological and actual *connections* between women and children, women in philosophy of education have not left them out of their proposals for social change. In beginning with selves defined through relationships with others, for example, most have sought a more realistic and complex understanding, struggling simultaneously to empower women *and* ensure the welfare of children. (Leach 1991, p. 299)

There are many ways of telling my story. I have chosen to simultaneously tell and critique my story because, for me, this is a way of getting at educational change. My own experience as a woman is one of oppression and this oppression is extended to the children with whom I live and work. So it is that I choose to explore this oppression within my own life and then extend this exploration into my work in the classroom. How can we imagine new ways of being in the classroom? Hopefully this will emerge from my story.

How each one of us tells our story is unique. There will be points of connection and points of difference. In this way, we can continue to restory, to understand our story in new ways; "one's 'reality,' rather than being fixed and predefined, is a perpetual emergent, becoming increasingly multiplex, as more perspectives are taken, more texts are opened, more friendships are made" (Greene, 1988, p. 23). I have chosen to tell my story as a mother/teacher. My critique of my work is built upon the premise that teaching is a moral act and that "the young are most likely to be stirred to learn when they are challenged by teachers who themselves are learning, who are breaking with what they have too easily taken for

granted, who are creating their own moral lives" (Greene, 1978, p. 51). There is a sense of journey in Greene's comments and a sense of partnership or collaboration.

We rarely accept people as they are, 'if only' we think. This fantasy underlies many of the problems in our classrooms. Children intuitively know this and sit in harsher judgement of themselves than would be the judgement of their teachers. For some children, their experiences have taught them that the teacher won't like them anyway, so why even try. They have been judged and found wanting for many years. This is not a judgement that occurs only in schools. Schools are simply a reflection of the larger society. All of us are being continually judged, ours is a competitive society. It is such a common feature of our society I am not even aware that I play both parts, I am judged and I also judge. This has a profound effect on life in our classrooms. I am most conscious of its effects when I work with children who have been labelled, who have been judged and found wanting. 'Successful' children, however, suffer just as much because their sense of themselves is only as strong as the last judgement call, they may be 'found out' on the next test or in the next class. So strong is this sense of being judged that I have heard adults studying at the university refer to their fear of being found out, unmasked by their next course. There is no strong core of 'self' understanding that can weather these judgmental storms and see them for what they are, oppressive. The 'self' exists in tandem with these judgements. The lesson to be learned is that we all suffer from this continual judgement. I suffer as much as my students. Change is necessary for the well-being of everyone, and there is no better place to start than in the classroom.

> Anything a child feels is different about himself which cannot be referred to spontaneously, casually, naturally, and uncritically by the teacher can become a cause for anxiety and an obstacle to learning. The role of the teacher changes. From the often negative function of judge and jury, the teacher can rise to the far more useful and satisfying position of friend. Strangers hide feelings and pretend to be what they are not. Friends want to know and talk about everything. It is a good environment in which to learn. (Paley, 1979, p. xv)

Collecting And Preparing My Stories

I used the time as I drove to and from work to record my thoughts. There was nothing predetermined about these recordings other than the fact that I would, indeed, keep an oral record of my return to work. I had envisioned myself doing this recording as I came home from work each day. My experience was something different than this. I needed to give voice to what was happening in my life and so I began taping my thoughts in the morning as I drove to work in addition to the taping that I did on my way home from work. Occasionally, I would record my thoughts in the evening or early on a weekend morning. What kept me returning to the tape recorder was my constant need to give voice to what I was experiencing. There was also a time when I quickly wrote out my thoughts and other times when I would type my stories directly into the computer. This did not happen often but it was always accompanied with a feeling of well-being because it meant I had time to

do something besides home or school work.

My recordings began on December 21, 1990 and ended on June 29, 1991. There was one brief period of time when I did not use the tape recorder. It was a time period of approximately two weeks at the beginning of March when I felt that I had finally made it to the mountaintop, I had reached a place in my life where all was as I thought it should be and for those two weeks I lived this illusion. When it came crashing down around me I returned to taping.

It was not until my work in the school was over that I began to transcribe my tapes. I did not have the time while I was working to begin this task. What I heard on those tapes was my voice laden with emotion as I talked about whatever mattered on a particular day. What I heard beyond the words brought back the intensity of the moment and I lived it once again. Transcribing was an emotionally draining task. When I finished transcribing I had a journal of my return to work. I put it away. I felt as tired when I completed that task as I did when I finished teaching.

With time came a perspective on my work that I am now sharing with you, the reader. The journal entries were fixed in a specific time period but the understandings I construct are ongoing. In my writing I have set apart the journal entries. The understandings that I have constructed as I restory these journal entries are wrapped around 'the simple words of my life.'

My life is lived as a whole and the stories that I have taken from my journal, even as they appear separately, resonate with an interconnectedness. This is the sense I made of my work at this time in my life.

Sharing my journal entries with you was my way of having you enter the emotional space of my life. I wanted you to have the opportunity to hear beyond the words. This also honoured my journey towards a more holistic 'self' understanding. I exist beyond the words themselves and in my experience that is the place of most profound connection.

Chapter 5

A New Narrative Journey Begins

A job offer, I was euphoric! I had waited a long time for this. All the possible objections were drowned in my enthusiasm. I could manage a two hour round trip drive. I had taught behaviour disordered children before. Someone had to teach this class, why not me? We would manage on the homefront.

It had been fourteen years since I last taught. I saw myself as more mother than teacher. Who would I be in the classroom? How would I cope?

Alone In The Classroom: Beginning My Work

After my tour of the school and an introduction to the staff I was left alone in my classroom to begin my work as a teacher. And what did I do? I washed out the lockers that had been placed at the back of the room. In one sense I saw this as simply an outlet for my nervous energy, and yet in another sense I saw it as a symbolic act bridging my worlds.

I tried to make my classroom a place where I thought students would like to be. It was not an easy room to set up because it was not a regular classroom but a smaller room that had been used as a work room for teachers. It was a rectangular, inside room with one long wall of shelves and another long wall of bulletin boards with windows above them that brought in some of the light from the hallway. At one end of this wall was the door and at the other end were the lockers. One of the windows had been removed. This was done with the hope air circulation in the

room would be improved. Instead, it provided another route for my students to move objects into and out of the room. The short wall at the back of the room was covered with bulletin boards. The short wall nearest the door was covered with a white board and beside that was a sink. The carpeted floor bore the residue of various chemicals, its stains gave it a lengthy history.

The sink, initially, proved to be a problem. It hung on the wall as a source of conflict and tension for many weeks. I had brought a plastic glass for each student so that they could have a drink of water whenever they needed one. The air in the room was dry and I hoped that by giving them this opportunity we would circumvent the usual struggles between teacher and student about the appropriateness of leaving the room. They simply had to get up from their desk and get a drink when they needed one. This they did, but it was never simply a matter of getting a drink. These trips to the sink became an opportunity to attack or get back at another student. Glasses were dropped in the garbage can, hidden, or sometimes broken; names were erased or soap was deposited in the glasses. After these outbursts I would remove the glasses for a period of time and then we would try again. I spoke to the students about their abuse of these glasses and the privilege that went with them and I remember this discussion as my first encounter with the problematic nature of language in the classroom. Their understanding of the word abuse was in no way related to the damage done to property. It was a telling moment in my journey to understand the lives of these children.

I created simple displays to fill some of the bulletin boards. Not all of the space was filled, I wanted the empty space to reflect the students' interests. This

happened quickly when one of the students filled the space with ribbons, pictures and descriptions, all focussed on his hobby. I made a place for the students' belongings, a shelf labelled with each student's name. Another set of shelves housed our reading center. A third set of shelves contained writing supplies, I labelled it 'office supplies.' This name was part of my deliberate attempt to create an atmosphere in the classroom that would help all of us think about our work in the classroom differently.

Within the school itself my classroom was located at the hub of the school. My room was located along a hallway that housed the library and the principal's office as well as the classroom and office in which the vice-principal worked. I came to understand this location in more than a physical way. All of the people who worked here wove their presence in and out of my work and I came to feel a strong sense of connection.

Together In The Classroom: Beginning Our Work

After some discussion with the administration about how and when we, students and teacher, would begin our work together the moment arrived.

> . . . on the third day, a Friday, they moved their desks and belongings into my room. They were excited and excitable and seemed to be hanging off every available ledge. Speaking with them individually did not prepare me for this collective onslaught. I came home tired and scared. I ended up in bed sobbing over the day's events and the amount of work that lay ahead both in my classroom and in my home. Simply put, I could not cope. (Journal, December 21, 1990, p. 1)

Seven students, all boys, identified as behaviour disordered. I had read the reports. This only prepared me for individuals, it did not prepare me for the

collective experience, the group dynamics. Looking back, I am not sure that anything could. I was immediately overwhelmed by the nature of their interactions. My deliberate attempts to create a milieu that said something other than school were not successful. The collective sense that the students had already made about what it meant to be in a classroom overpowered my ideas of what a classroom might be.

Six of the boys in my classroom were Native students. They referred to themselves as Indian and their use of the word Indian carried with it the pejorative meaning so common in our society. They used their race and culture as a weapon, their only references to being Indian were derogatory, a way of hurting one another. A line was drawn between those who lived on the Reserve and those who lived in the urban setting. At other times these allegiances dissolved and were replaced with other, temporary alliances. There were also derogatory comments made to those who wore their hair braided. Initially, I did not address the cultural reality of my classroom; in the messiness of our beginning it seemed to me that it would further divide rather than unite us as a community of learners. My struggle to address the cultural reality of my classroom was also affected by the students' behaviour towards one another. I was too busy in the beginning fighting grass fires, working through this unacceptable behaviour, to move onto a more positive plane.

The story began as a messy one, each day's events prescribing a particular focus. This kept me off balance. I could, at best, only predict what each day would bring. I felt like a beginning swimmer, I could barely keep my head above water.

Developing Relationships

Each one of us was an unknown in that classroom. We knew very little about one another. These children had two stories to tell about themselves, the public story and the private story. The public story was one of bravado laced with foul language and aggressive behaviour.

> . . . why is it that he can come into the room, quietly hang up his coat, go to his desk, accept the books, do the work and then something snaps. This happens every day with him. He screams at me that I have AIDS. He's foulmouthed, tells me to fuck off . . . [he's] climbing up shelves, he takes everything off my desk . . . he rips it up in shreds or scribbles in it . . . what is it that triggers this all the time? (Journal, January 7, 1991, p. 25)

These were the students' own stories, not the stories others told of them but the stories that they, themselves, had constructed about their lives. They were told, initially, in the physical and verbal abuse that was a part of each day in the classroom. The intensity of their stories overwhelmed me and I was in territory of which I knew little. All of my efforts were geared to toning down the story. Why did they tell their stories this way? Is this how they made people listen to what they had to say? Or was this the only way they knew? As we lived each day in the classroom these questions were shoved into the background as I sought some kind of order. We came to exist in a kind of tension, never knowing if this was the day when, finally, the stories would be told differently.

I went back into teaching thinking of myself as more mother than teacher. How I saw myself and told my story focussed on relationships. When the students' responses were not what I had anticipated I was devastated. I felt at fault and my search for an explanation of this failure centered exclusively on the

developing relationships between myself and my students.

> . . . how do you work with children that have no initiation, no familiarity with caring? They don't know that response, they've never been in that kind of a relationship and so I find now that what happens is that the children are terrified by it and once they realize what's happened they have a terrible, angry reaction to it. (Journal, December 26, 1990, p. 19)

Here, I was writing their life stories. I was using my own experiences to construct an understanding of their experiences. I was not truly listening to them, I did not hear how they authored their own life stories. There were moments of authentic communication but because many of their stories existed beyond the boundaries of my own experience I was not able, initially, to build upon these moments of connection.

> Students, like teachers, are historically situated beings, whose complex subjectivities are socially defined and at the same time are internalized and lived. Both students and teachers have experienced and participated in relationships of domination, submission, oppression, and privilege which have helped to shape who they are and how they interpret the world. This recognition of students and teachers as historically situated subjects with conflicting gender, race, and class interests is vital to understanding the possibilities and limits of the classroom. (Weiler, 1988, p. 125)

Nor had I looked at the larger, societal issues involved in these stories. This would become an important part of my work but I was initially overwhelmed by life in my classroom.

What provokes the angry response of these children? Is it because I

> am an adult? Is it because I'm a teacher? Is it because I'm a woman? Is it because my skin is white? Maybe it's all of these things. I wonder in the situation what it is of those things that they're responding to. (Journal, December 26, 1990, p. 21)

It was as if pursuing this line of reasoning would do nothing to help me during the next period, the next day or the next week. Perhaps it was realizing that I couldn't change any of these factors, there was nowhere to go with this line of thought. My focus was on the particular, the day-to-day happenings in my classroom. Because the focus was on me, I missed the point. What I needed was some insight into their lives in order to restory my understanding of our classroom experiences. Even when I did question myself about these issues and try to make sense of them I had continued as the storyteller. What I needed to do was listen, to provide opportunities for their stories to be heard. This meant picking up little things they said at the most unexpected of times. I had to be flexible to respond to the moment.

What they wanted from me was an acknowledgement, an acceptance of their world. As long as I was shocked by their language and behaviour and set up a scenario where they would be disciplined for this they continued the same patterns. Their foul language diminished once I spoke directly to them about it. Eventually these behaviours were no longer common place,they arose when the students were under duress. I remember one student telling me, "teacher, you're weird." I accepted his compliment. I was 'weird' because I had spoken directly to him about this issue. There was no disciplining involved, just straight forward talk about the nature of his foul language.

Restorying Our Classroom Understanding Of 'Control'

> Language can mystify and hide its own assumptions . . . educators often label students who respond to alienating and oppressive school experiences with a whole range of resistant behaviors. They call such students deviant rather than resistant, for such a label would raise different questions about the nature of schooling and the reasons for such student behavior." (Giroux, 1984, p. 34)

In my classroom Giroux's argument coalesced around the issue of control. I was conscious of trying to implement a different kind of control in my classroom, a control that was negotiated and for which each individual in the room took some responsibility. To me, the issue of control was *the* important issue for these children. Associated with control is power and I felt that these children's behaviours were, in part, a reaction to their sense of powerlessness. I mean this as a response to more than their powerlessness in school, it was also a response to the systemic powerlessness they felt as Indians. They were always left wondering if the treatment they received was because of who they were or because of what they did. I struggled with this issue and the many conflicting understandings of what control meant in my classroom.

> I don't know that I can define . . . how it is I feel about control but when I have somebody in my classroom observing me and marking me . . . I'm very conscious of it and I think to myself . . . I'm failing. But on the other hand we haven't discussed what it means to control students and I think that on the [evaluation] sheet it says . . . self-control . . . and I agree with that but I don't know that it's very clear in my mind yet how we're going to achieve that in a very instantaneous kind of way or in a way that isn't teacher imposed.

(Journal, March 12, 1991, p. 95-96)

> I'm just thinking over the day and we did an interesting map on choosing a homestead and they get so excited and they get so noisy and they're up at the board. And I don't know where you draw the line between really involved and excited in learning and out of control. And I suppose it would be a matter of being excited if you had a regular class. Maybe it's just the name that these kids have that makes me fearful when they get so excited about something. (Journal, May 15, 1991, p. 122)

Complicating the issue were my students' own ideas about how control should be exercised in schools. When they did express their ideas I was surprised by the calmness and the sureness of my response. And this was one conversation where I knew that my students heard the message in more than just my words, it resonated from my entire being.

> . . . he said, "We need somebody strict to come in this room every couple of minutes." And I said, "No we don't, that's what we have to do for ourselves, we have to learn to be able to control our behaviour." (Journal, February 4, 1991, p. 56)

This is a common expectation of students, "years of classroom experience allow students to have very specific expectations of how teachers should act in the classroom. Students, for example, expect teachers to maintain classroom control, enforce rules, and present the curriculum" (Britzman, 1986, p. 445). Every day I felt torn between these competing views of control, our developing relationships seemed to pivot on this issue. These attempts to renegotiate an understanding of control as shared responsibility had many 'down' moments.

> . . . something happened in my classroom—everything degenerated. All of the students were so angry with me and I became the target of their verbal abuse. If you had to find a positive, at least they were united and therefore not physically/verbally abusing one another. But it was awful for me—I was a moving target unable to restore any sense of

> pupil/teacher or even a decent classroom environment. The principal and vice principal came to my rescue. . . . [The] vice principal suggested that I organize my room in centers. This gives rise to the issue of control and it is definitely a need of these students to exercise some control over their learning. (Journal, January 14, 1991, handwritten)

When I did get a momentary glimpse of the possibility of our work together, it reinforced the vision I held.

> . . . this is the first time that these kids have exercised any kind of self-control. Dennis . . . intervened at recess to stop a fight and helped out the grade threes. Adam, for the second time, . . . removed himself . . . from the situation that would cause a fight. Today he intervened between two boys in the gym to prevent a fight. (Journal, February 4, 1991, p. 56)

> . . . yesterday started off so ugly with Kenny calling me bitch and running around the room and refusing to do anything even though he was given many, many choices and, indeed, was given his first choice. He just decided to take this stand . . . he was able to turn that around . . . that's the one difference that's occurred . . . these children don't carry this through the day. (Journal, February 20, 1991, p. 75)

Weaving itself into this issue of control was the issue of gender. These students had very different expectations of male and female teachers and in a more general sense they exhibited disturbing attitudes towards women.

> I talked today about these boys' attitude toward women. It is very disturbing . . . Women are sexual objects. The only women they speak respectfully of are their grandmas. (Journal, January 14, 199l, handwritten)

> She [another teacher] just mentioned it yesterday and I have thought about this for a long time. . . . Why is it the children treat us this particular way—because we're women. . . . They don't treat men like this and the field trips I'm planning are field trips where they go out and there are men there, they relate to men in a completely different way. They are so abusive [toward] women and I'm trying to think, is it societal, is it what they see in their families? It's horrid . . . and I've tempered their response somewhat perhaps because I've responded to them in a different way . . . but I really am

> appalled at what their opinion of women is and how they treat women. (Journal, January 26, 1991, p. 44)

Further complicating the issue of control were my own ideas about the place of silence in the classroom. It is around this issue of silence that my old image of myself as a teacher and my emerging image of myself as a teacher collided. I had learned that silent classrooms were classrooms that indicated that the teacher was in control and the students were learning. But as I returned to the classroom I had developed very different ideas about how it is that children learn and also about my part in the learning process. While it was clear in my mind that this was my problem rather than the children's problem it still affected our work together in the classroom.

> I have to deal with . . . me and noise. I have a problem. I need a quiet classroom. I don't mean the children can't talk but it has to be quiet and I need to think about this more because I think when you're working with boys there's just going to be noisy times. Maybe I'd feel better if the noise to date had been more constructive rather than destructive. (Journal, January 24, 1991, p. 40)

> The other thing that always bothers me is my need for quiet and of course these children have some difficulty with that . . . I'm so frustrated. (Journal, February 5, 1991, p. 56-57)

In my journal writing the issue of noise eventually became a non-issue. There was an understanding that we negotiated as a class. We did, in fact, come to an understanding of how to work together in the classroom. I did not abandon my ideas about a mutually negotiated control. Too often in classroom practice when something doesn't work out as expected I have abandoned the idea. What was of particular interest to me this time was the fact that I could not be otherwise in the classroom. My sense of my 'self' was entrenched in my understanding of control.

This was a telling example of my emergent image of myself as a mother/teacher. My way of being with children had evolved as I 'grew' with my own children. I knew that, given enough time, the students would trust me and so my part in all of this was to speak and act in a way that was consistent with what I believed until the children, themselves, could see the possibilities for our work together. At times, though, I questioned my return to the classroom. I needed this job and was determined to persevere but the idea of failure played continually at the periphery of my mind.

> You know, I wonder if this is how men feel all the time? Knowing that you have to work that you don't have a choice, that financially you're so burdened you know that you have to keep going, you can't just throw up your hands and say, enough. (Journal, January 21, 1991, p. 37)

The issue of control also figured in the children's play. "Play and its necessary core of storytelling are the primary realities in the preschool and kindergarten, and they may well be the prototypes for imaginative endeavors throughout our lives" (Paley, 1990, p. 6). They liked games and particularly those games that could be manipulated to suit their imaginings. The children's absorption in this activity was total. Their conversation was one of negotiation and story telling. But like Paley (1984) and her students we were always compromising.

> This morning I had activities planned and the arrangement was that they would do those two activities and then Kenny said, "Well if we do them then could we play Lego?" But there had been a problem earlier at recess and the boys were calling Miles names and he refused to come in the room. So Kenny said, "No name calling, we can't pick on Miles, we get our work done and then we can play Lego." . . . he and I coaxed Miles back into the room and Kenny and Miles were so good about getting their work done. (Journal, February 11, 1991, p. 63)

This play was a part of the 'fun' they described to their former classmates. I did not conceptualize play and work as opposites. For children play is work. Still, I limited the time they engaged in playing because I heard the expectations about what should be happening in schools. On one occasion a grade four student confided to me that the students in my class were, indeed, telling their former classmates that they were having fun and the student sought my reassurance that things would change. I walked a tight rope, not wanting to fall to either side.

My first attempt to allow the children to play left me reeling. What was I expecting? After all the pieces were put together to resemble what or whomever in the story then it followed that the story must be acted out. But I was not ready for this acting out. The noise and movement were in total contrast to the quiet, focussed play of a few minutes earlier. I moved to end the activity. This struggle between my sense of appropriate behaviour and their sense of total engagement continued during our time together.

At other times this struggle moved beyond the confines of our classroom. My experience was similar to Paley's (1984), "what I worry about is not control but the appearance of control. Instead of asking myself, 'Is running a natural and necessary part of a five-year-old's indoor play?' I ask, 'What will people think?'" (p. 77).

> . . . the boys were lingering on in the room [after lunch] and so I said bonus points for whoever can get out the door and they were in a good frame of mind and they were being quite jovial and Kenny went out the door and he wanted Adam out first rather than Miles so what he did was he stood with his legs wide apart in the door to prevent Miles from getting out before Adam. Miles who would normally just start crying or carrying on put on his coat and dived between Kenny's legs out into the hallway and of course Adam

> tumbled out after them and they were all out there laughing and carrying on. They'd had a wonderful time. I was sitting at my desk just watching, I had a laugh too . . .when another teacher, who I greatly respect, . . . came upon the scene and got mad at them. Oh I felt terrible, I just felt so torn and didn't know what to do so I went out in the hall and said something not nice to Miles about his behaviour and I realized I'd given in at the moment, you know, and I felt badly about if afterwards. (Journal, April 23, p. 114-115)

So strong were my feelings about this incident that later in the day I apologized to Miles for the inappropriateness of my reaction. I felt badly because I had betrayed the very sense of community that I was trying to build in my classroom.

The issue of control was always present in my work but I was not always aware of just how that issue presented itself. What was the message that I was giving the children?

Restorying My Image Of Myself As A Teacher

I struggled with my teaching image. As a mother who was now teaching I knew that my responses to my students were modelled on my responses to my own children and their experiences of schooling. My idea was to make our work in the classroom more of a collaborative effort. We all had a part to play in the construction of a classroom community. Yet my emerging image conflicted with the expectations of my students. This was not a philosophical restructuring of my teaching image but rather a day to day reconstruction that took place within the classroom.

Paley (1990) told the story of the "quintessential outsider" (p. xi), Jason. She described teaching as

> an awesome responsibility. We must become aware of the essential

> loneliness of each child. Our classrooms, at all levels, must look more like happy families and secure homes, the kind in which all family members can tell their private stories, knowing they will be listened to with affection and respect. (p. 147-148)

I returned to the classroom with this same understanding and my attempts to create this environment in my classroom centered on my understanding of responsibility. The root of responsibility is response—the response of student to teacher, teacher to student, and student to student. Implicit in response is connectedness. I saw our engagement in the classroom as a mutual endeavour. It was my task to share responsibility with my students so that they would come to an understanding of how it is that one acts responsibly. Underlying control is an assumption that I, as teacher, am the only one capable of telling the classroom story and, indeed, that there is only one story to be told. At issue here is not whether I exhibit control or its polar opposite, lack of control, but rather how it is that I understand control.

The earlier understanding that I had constructed of the word 'control' focussed on my work as 'policing'. Now I understood control differently but in judging my own work in the classroom, initially, I was quick to see myself as a failure because I did not do a good job of policing. At any moment and for reasons I could not fathom one student's world would explode and this would trigger a series of interactions with other students. Insults would fly back and forth, fighting would erupt, furniture would be kicked and thrown about. And I was left feeling totally inadequate. What was I doing in this place? What had I done wrong? What should I have done? I understood that my students were angry. Making the issue

one of student anger rather than teacher control helped me to understand my classroom in a different way. But at the time these events were occurring my image of myself as a teacher was undergoing radical revision and all too frequently I reverted to the image of myself as a teacher that I had constructed many years ago.

Indeed, my emergent image of myself as a teacher blurred with the issue of control. One of my students would holler at me, "you aren't the boss of me!" I didn't argue this point with him, I didn't see myself as his boss either, but who was I? I was still struggling with the idea that the work of teachers was to control students even as I tried to live a different understanding in my classroom. My dilemma was ongoing because I, myself, experienced the controlling mechanisms of curriculum, standardized testing, evaluation, and societal expectations.

I have learned through my own restorying that to be oppressed is to be oppressive (Grumet, 1988). I wanted my students to experience the sense of empowerment that comes with this 'self' understanding. "I wonder if what is called pedagogy may not be simply a question of power, and if we shouldn't be speaking and writing much more about hidden power struggles instead of racking our brains about finding better methods of childrearing [teaching]" (a colleague cited in Miller, 1990, p. 276).

I had spent the last fourteen years of my life as an outsider. Women who stay at home to raise their children are removed from the mainstream of our culture because there is no monetary reward for the work that they do. These women are seen and not heard. If they do manage to scream loudly enough their ideas are often dismissed as idiosyncratic or worse. Heilbrun (1979) made the point that the

condition of being an outsider is what gives a woman the courage to be herself. I saw myself as more mother than teacher and so it became very important to me to construct an image of myself that was inclusive, mother/teacher, rather than exclusive, mother or teacher.

Some of these children struggled in their own lives, happy families and secure homes were not a part of their stories. They were to teach me about the primary connectedness of mother and child but even before I was aware of this lesson I think that we were, in fact, extending this primary relationship. If I presented a different way of being in a classroom would these children respond? I thought so. Each day brought with it glimmers of hope and moments of doubt as I persevered.

> I have to question whether or no I'm too motherly. Can it be that you in that individual way that you have of relating to each child create this kind of havoc? I don't know I'm just asking a question. (Journal, January 7, 1991, p. 24)

> I do like children that's the only thing I can think about myself that makes a difference. I truly do like children, all of these children. What they do makes me very angry. And I've told him that, I do not like his behaviours whenever they've been inappropriate but I like him. That's all I can think of. (Journal, January 24, 1991, p. 41)

> I think now I look at children differently you know that's part of being older perhaps but I think more importantly it's part of being a mother. So you notice, you look deep into their eyes. You hear the pain behind the comments they make. . . . You're concerned about what it is they eat and the kind of energy it will give them. You see the slightness or the strength of their bodies. You know there's so many things about the children that I don't know that I noticed before. (Journal, January 28, 1991, p. 48)

While I knew in my head that there were many different expectations of teachers and ideas about teaching, in my heart I held only one vision. If I could

create this vision in this classroom then I knew there was a place for me in teaching. This came to be a daily judgement call on the place of mothering in my teaching. And I agonized over my actions and their appropriateness for my work. Yet how could I be otherwise, this was my authentic 'self.'

"We do not need to be told whether to be strict or permissive with our children. What we do need is to have respect for their needs, their feelings, and their individuality, as well as for our own" (Miller, 1990, p. xiv). I have drawn on the work of Miller because I do not differentiate between parenting and pedagogy. We all have histories and that which is deeply embedded, the unexamined, is what governs our way of being in the world. Parents cannot blame teachers, teachers cannot blame parents. We are one in the same. This is the understanding that I took with me into the classroom. It was an understanding born during those years when I was at home with my children. During that time I felt society's expectations of me as a mother and those expectations were confined to my work in my home. This conflicted with my 'self' understanding. I was a teacher who was now, also, a mother but this holistic 'self' was never honoured. It was as if a part of me had been severed.

Becoming A Community Of Learners

A semblance of order emerged from the chaos as we developed a common understanding of how we would work together as a class. The telling moment came during an art class when the students began talking about their brothers. I listened until one of the students asked if I had a brother. I was happy to be

included and shared a story about my brother. This was our first collective effort at sharing our stories and it held out so much promise. And then, about a week later, the moment arrived when the children felt comfortable enough to share in a more organized manner.

> . . . before they started to write they started to tell stories. And I can't remember a nicer time when everyone talked. And they told about all their scars and sores and car accidents. But they listened to one another, they took turns, there was no silliness, no rudeness, no sexual innuendo, no foolishness. Everyone told their stories and listened to everyone else tell theirs. (Journal, January 28, 1991, p. 45)

This was the beginning—a moment of authenticity and connection and it proved to be the basis for continued storytelling.

When the children themselves addressed their cultural reality it made me aware of two things. First of all, I knew then that they felt comfortable enough with me to begin to develop their own curriculum. And following from this, our discussions would be authentic, not imposed.

> And for the first time today we were able to speak in a constructive way about the Native culture. I did not initiate the conversation but I certainly supported it. (Journal, January 16, 1991, p. 28).

The climate of the classroom was developing such that the children could give voice to a more complete picture of who they were and their voices came to echo in all that we did in the classroom. There was still anger in their voices and sometimes I did not understand what it was they were saying. But I could listen and, by listening to the anger, two things happened. The students sometimes came to understand their own anger and I came to a better understanding of my students. Our cultural differences also provided me with an opportunity for introspection and

change. "It is often hard to learn from people who are just like you. Too much is taken for granted. Homogeneity is fine in a bottle of milk, but in the classroom it diminishes the curiosity that ignites discovery" (Paley, 1979, p. 56).

Who they were became the focus of our curricular endeavours. The discussions that followed our shared reading of native legends allowed the children to make connections between the stories and themselves. The connections they made were enlightening to me and of real interest to one another. It was also the beginning of a positive, sustained look at what it meant to be Indian. Our reading of native legends developed into a biweekly activity and it came to include a snack prepared by the students. This was our first collaborative effort at planning. It provided a springboard for further discussions, discussions that took place in a broader context. They came to question the place of Indians in our other work.

> Our trip to the firehall was a great success. And the boys . . . talked about . . . being Indian and I thought that was a very positive step forward . . . it was Kenny who said to the fireman, "Are there any Indians here?" (Journal, January 22, 1991, p. 38)

> The children love listening to these native legends. The one we read today is about how the loon lost its voice. We also read the one about the loon's necklace. And I was alternating these tales [with] other folk tales. . . . But I think in view of their response I'd be better off to switch to straight native stories, they were truly enjoying every word of it. (Journal, February 11, 1991, p. 62)

> [W]e are only now getting to this point where we can share. I read The Story of Jumping Mouse (Steptoe, 1984) and we had an opportunity in there to discuss bison. And of course the Indians hunted them, as Dennis said, and I had a chance to explain that the Indians were hunters certainly but they were . . . environmentalists and how they carefully used up everything, there was no waste . . . we got onto the movie Dances with Wolves (Costner et al, 1990). That boy beamed from ear to ear, he was so proud of who he was. And it was a piece of information that anybody, really, could share with him. . . . And yet I realize we don't, I never did that when I

> taught before and so there's something here I've learned from him beyond what it is that happens between the two of us. (Journal, February 19, 1991, p. 73)

> I had to pass out dental consent slips. . . . It turned out, by coincidence that I hadn't even noticed, that the three slips [went to] Indian children and Dennis said . . . very angrily, why did only Indians get these? . . . Dennis was extremely upset and I leaned over and just said to him, Dennis these are only going to children who were not in the school last year and therefore did not fill out a consent form or to children who were in the school last year but didn't [return it]. But I realized that intense anger that, perhaps this time at least was voiced, . . . hasn't been voiced . . . in the past and that's what builds up that chip, I think, that makes him such an angry student that he ends up in a behaviour classroom. (Journal, February 22, 1991, p. 80)

> . . . the big thing on there [diagnostic tests] is comprehension so now we've got charts with questions on it but at least they're their own questions and we ask them now after the reading of the story . . . the ones who were initially unable to predict according to the first test results are now doing that very effectively . . . perhaps it's the literature because I did choose another book, a beautiful book called Just a Dream (Van Allsburg, 1990) . . . and Adam [said] no no no I want one of those [native legends]. So I really think the use of native literature here is important to their success. (Journal, May 15, 1991, p. 122-123)

Expectations For My Work: Hearing Many Voices

There were so many layers to my understanding of what it meant to teach that it was difficult to sort them out, to know the source of all the expectations I had for my work. My own expectations for my work wove themselves in and out of the expectations of others.

Four weeks after I started working with this class I received my first evaluation. In the uncertain climate that was my classroom this event triggered disconcerting expectations.

I feel pressured this morning because I'm going to be evaluated. I

> feel pressured because I never know how these children will respond, what the day brings for them as well as for me. (Journal, January 21, 1991, p. 35)

The pressure came from the evaluation document and all of the categories, the expectation of what was to be seen in my classroom.

My program existed within the larger school program and the mandated curriculum, and in these contexts there were many different expectations of what should be happening in my classroom. Sometimes the expectations were stated explicitly, sometimes the expectations were more felt, than heard, on my part.

> I just don't know what it is I'm supposed to be doing. Now in a way I do, in my personal way I do, but it doesn't translate very well in the school. And I realized that there's something wrong with me, I don't mean wrong in a bad sense. But I pick up too much from other people. So I hear the principal and I think, oh those are his expectations, and then I hear the vice-principal and I think, oh those are her expectations, the same goes for the assistant superintendent. And pretty soon I'm just marching to so many pipers, all confused. And the one I don't listen to is me. . . . I realize the fundamental underlying importance of their [students'] stories and unless we're able to get them out it doesn't really make much sense to continue, but how do you do it? (Journal, February 4, 1991, p. 55)

> . . . I still feel the pressures of what people might be thinking, what people expect of me, what curriculum says. Obviously I'm not having a lot of success with curriculum and yet I feel the pressure always to be doing a particular sequence of things. Now some things in my room have worked successfully, some haven't, but any way you look at it I'm not doing, I think, what other people expect me to. Just as a for instance, [the suggestion was made] . . . at the beginning of this job that these students would group in a particular manner [based on reading tests] . . . I'm horrified by the word,when they're so angry and they're full of so much hate, how can you group them for anything? Even suggesting that they might be working on the same worksheet in math has, in the past, driven them crazy. And I've noticed it's only in the last week, and here we are at the end of January, that they are able to do things together and I mean things like eating their lunch or playing together so certainly to group would be premature. And yet I feel this expectation . . . to have them all working in these little groups on their reading skills.

> On the other hand, what's the point of reading skills if you won't read? And so my whole philosophy here is let's find books that you enjoy. Let's read those books and let's have you read those books to me and to other people. And I think for now that's enough.
>
> My own daughter's . . . so unhappy at school. She's so tired of the paper and pencil exercises, the hour of homework, all of the vocabulary etc. that she has to do. And I think it could be different. I thought that all through my years at university that somehow education could be different. I feel like a silent partner in this plot against her to get all of this done. Certainly she is disciplined enough because we are disciplined enough to do all that. But I have a class that has no discipline and I'm trying to make it better for them. In a sense the problem is compounded because they are so undisciplined and so unable to do anything and so part of my success has simply been in getting them to do something and then to come to enjoy the something that they are doing. Or maybe it's simply to find what it is they enjoy and to build on it. And the only thing that they seem to enjoy is drawing and so we use that a lot in terms of writing stories and doing science reports because the writing part is very weak but the drawing part is very strong. And yet for some of these children they've done more work than they did for the first four months and yet I don't seem satisfied do I? I seem to be pushing always. (Journal, January 29, 1991, p. 46-47)

> I feel that I haven't done enough but then I haven't had very much time. And then I think that everybody's ideas about what should be happening in this class were all so very different and they've all kinda come crashing down every time we have a discussion about what should be happening and I'm the only one who seems to kind of sit around stewing over the repercussions and I suppose that's the way it should be because after all this is what I've been given responsibility for. (Journal, February 21, 1991, p. 76)

Embedded in the many expectations for my work in this class were ideas about the use of time, the structure of our day together. I first experienced time as a large quantity of space that had to be somehow filled. Clandinin & Connelly (1986) in their reference to school cycles and rhythms stated that for beginning teachers the "transformation of our understanding of cycles as meaningless, fragmented and objective impositions to events having personal meaning in the way we 'know' teaching is through the narrative of our lived experience of teaching as

teachers" (p. 384).

When I first started with this class I did not set out our activities according to a timetable. We did not ignore the school's timetable, our activities were planned around recess, lunch, physical education and library. But the remaining blocks of time were not structured into periods. I did not know these children and I preferred to see where an activity would take us. Sometimes the children enjoyed an extended meaningful engagement, other times the classroom chaos would tell me it was time to move on. I marked time as time between fights and as times of peace, free from verbal abuse. The eruptions in my classroom made me think that there was no pattern emerging in our shared time.

> . . . never knowing what a day will be like with this class, not having that kind of predictability, I end up on edge all the time. (Journal, January 27, 1991, p. 31)

It took time away from the classroom to figure out that from this chaos patterns were emerging that suited all of the inhabitants of this classroom. It became our routine to read and write each day until morning recess. It became our routine to snack and read native legends twice a week after afternoon recess. It became our routine to have center time for the last half hour of the day. Those routines emerged quickly and made sense to all of us.

Starting in the middle of a school year also created difficulties as I tried to become a part of an existing community.

> . . . if you start in September . . . everybody builds together a community . . . they can find support but for those of us who start in the middle of the year there's the added stress and pressure. . . (Journal, January 21, 1991, p. 37)

> . . . I've never had a chance to be alone with these teachers without

> students and for me, then, it was a very important day. I can't believe how relaxing it was, how nice it was to talk to people knowing you didn't have to run off and be interrupted. (Journal, January 26, 1991, p. 43)

Returning to work once the school year had commenced made me acutely aware that my classroom lacked any kind of rhythm. It took some time before I was able to feel a part of the ongoing activities in the school, the activities that had much earlier been decided upon and were now taking place as a matter of course. I had not been part of that process and I felt, at times, like I was groping along in the dark.

It had also been a long time since I had experienced the rhythms of a school year. But as I became a part of the community I was able to reach out to other teachers and they helped me to understand the moods and feelings evoked by these rhythms.

> . . . I feel this terrible discouragement . . . and she said it's this time of year and it's how teachers feel at this time of year and I think maybe that's it. (Journal, March 7, 1991, p. 93)

Curriculum and 'time' tabling were inseparable pieces of the school puzzle. As I introduced more of the mandated grade four curriculum the day became more fragmented. This fragmentation brought with it, for me, a tension. How much of this curriculum could I introduce and how demanding of the students should I be?

> We kind of have this general routine but it isn't fixed and lately the boys have been coming in and saying, what's next? And I thought . . . I haven't had a timetable posted and I was feeling badly about that and now when I think about it that isn't it at all. The issue is that they want to get on to doing something, that they're excited. It's not a . . . negative matter . . . it could be seen as one of excitement . . . they didn't even ask it before. (Journal, February 25, 1991, p. 82)

The process of integration with the other grade four classes also made it necessary to restructure our timetable. I don't know that the students experienced the tension of timetabling in the way that I did but they helped to create it because their guiding principles were mood and engagement. I never knew whether they would willingly stop an activity and start another or whether they would hang on tenaciously, hoping that I would give in to their request for more time. The linear structure of the mandated curriculum and the timetable did not always match the circularity of my students' needs and interests.

Each one of us experienced time differently in our daily lives and we brought our personal understandings into the classroom. And while we were in the classroom we had to somehow bring together these personal understandings of time with the understanding of time that is built into the structure of schools

My own experience was one of disorder and confusion. Having to restructure my life was not an easy task. The chaos of the morning as I prepared to leave for work never ceased but, for me, that chaos became routine. Eventually order did come out of the chaos.

> I feel as though I have conquered time rather than being a slave to time. I am not sure how to express this. When I first started to work I was like a hamster on one of those wheels, constantly running and never going anywhere. There was never enough time to do everything and I was always on edge. Now I feel differently. I think ahead, I can plan for a week or more. (Journal, May 7, 1991, p. 8)

My students often arrived late for school and one particular day one of the students arrived in a particularly grumpy mood. He finally told me that he had gone to bed at 4:00 a.m. Why had he come to school at all? Grateful that he had shared

this information with me, I let him be. School was, for him, a constant wake up call. On another occasion he was sitting on the floor playing while I read. When I said it was time to clean up and prepare for dismissal he became confused, he had been totally absorbed, my voice had interrupted a child who was lost in time. He asked what time it was and what day it was, I sensed that he was even unsure about where he was. It was the one and only time I sensed his vulnerability. For that time he was truly a child.

Another student, too, was always tired from late nights and I spent a disproportionate amount of time with him most mornings in order to work through his fatigue and anger. He made a great show of being tired, he would flop around on the floor, drag himself to his desk and verbally present his impassioned case of fatigue. He had been labelled hyperactive.

> [It was] suggested that perhaps we should think about medication for him, I mean he is kind of hyper, [but] that sent chills down my spine. (Journal, January 28, 1991, p. 44)

The complexity of his behaviour belied this simple antidote. He engaged with story and storytelling in such a complete way, mind, body and soul, that I was awestruck by his intensity. Sometimes I used this understanding to disrupt his aggressive behaviour in the classroom. It would be like a magic spell had been cast over him and he would become a different child. He would sit, wide-eyed, totally absorbed in the story. His enjoyment of the story was expressed in the look of pleasure on his face. He, too, was a child who easily lost track of time when he became absorbed in an activity. These times became a time of wonder for me.

Building A Classroom Community Through Different Kinds of Stories

From the beginning it was stories that provided the children and I with a meaningful link, reading stories was something that each one of us enjoyed. What was also important to this class were those special activities that interrupted our emerging daily routine, these became our shared stories.

I understood the behaviour of my students to be, in part, a reaction to the institution itself but it took some time before this understanding was reflected in my teaching practice.

> . . . all of the chaos and meanness and oh terrible problems I've had in the last month, is that a necessary part of education . . . is that what you have to do with children in order to get to a point where you can actually kind of do things together as a group? Or does the system itself set you up for that and . . . that makes the children's response to you kind of a response to the whole system? (Journal, January 24, 1991, p. 41-42)

> . . . is it the school setting, is it so demanding of them or is there something in what it means to be in school that makes it so difficult for these children to be there that they have to act this way . . . is there such an artificiality to everything that happens there that you bring out the worst in them just by putting them in a school? (Journal, February 2, 1991, p. 53)

Certainly my own children had fixed ideas about what was to happen in school and about how a teacher was to act. When my daughter spent a day visiting my classroom she remarked that her visit had been enjoyable but she would like to come back on a day when I was actually teaching. Watching young children as they play 'school' is also a reminder of the fixed understanding that exists in our society about what should be happening in schools.

My students' responses to me were not, in fact, responses to me,

personally. They were responding to the same, preconceived ideas about teachers and their relationships with their students that my own daughter had identified. I represented an institution and it was an institution that my students did not trust.

The structure of school presented other problems. Children are asked to form new communities each September as they return for a new school year. Sometimes they are expected to form new communities within the school year, which was the case with my class. This structure sets children up as outsiders, they are continually having to begin anew.

Nor is there is any sense of connection between the larger community and the school community. It is this lack of connection that enabled my child to have very different expectations for my work in the classroom, as teacher, and my work at home, as mother. I sensed this lack of connection with my own students.

What started as an antidote to their aggression in the afternoon became, for me, a new way of understanding their behaviour. We began leaving the school on various field trips. At first, I was simply getting away to relieve the pressure that their aggression created in the classroom. It soon became evident that there was too much happening each time we left the school to ignore the profundity of the message my students were sending me.

The first activity that I planned was based on their love of stories, a trip to the library. It was a fiasco. This was the only trip that Chad took with this class, he changed schools shortly after. During the short time we spent together Chad remained an enigma. We established no points of connection. I honestly don't know what would have been the outcome of our ensuing trips had he remained a

part of this class. But the other factor to which I must give consideration is the fact that I planned this trip. I thought it was a good idea. After that experience, I made sure that the children were involved from the outset. Eventually these special activities that interrupted our daily routines did take place within our classroom and they were met with the same enthusiasm as our activities outside school. This change spoke to our growth as a community and their trust in me to provide that experience for them regardless of location.

These activities were important for two reasons. They were planned collaboratively and each trip provided us with a common experience on which to build a sense of shared understandings, a sense of community. 'Remember when', 'remember the time', were phrases used to begin much of our conversation. It was during these activities, more than anywhere else, that our sense of our 'selves' was evident because there was a willingness to share our 'selves.' They could be somebody different when they ventured out of the school and they could relate to me and to each other differently. They never fought or used foul language, their engagement with the activity was total.

> . . . they were so good to one another, just in a normal kind of friendly way. There were no fights yesterday, no problems . . . is it because you take them out of the setting and they can let down their guard? And they are such lovely children and good to one another. And I don't know where all that pretense of being tough and fighting and being mean comes from. Miles . . . used no baby talk. Gerald was not at all defensive with anybody, threw no punches. What is it now that makes a difference? (Journal, February 2, 1991, p. 51)

> A field trip over to the junior high school was quite successful. They really are truly interested in seeing and touching and doing all these things and he was very good with them . . . explaining how different things were done . . . the metal presses and the wood drills

> and everything else. And I really don't think they're capable of any better behaviour. That sounds negative and I don't mean it to be. They're full of life, they're inquisitive and the worst thing they do is touch something that they're not supposed to touch, in the sense that that's not what we're talking about right now. Well that's not too bad. (Journal, January 28, 1991, p. 45)

Our one, ongoing activity was twice monthly visits to the local nursing home. I was apprehensive about this but I organized it because I had heard the students talk about their grandparents and it was the kind of talk I wanted to generate in the classroom. They were capable of loving, respectful relationships with their elders and I wanted to provide an opportunity in a different context for the development of this kind of relationship. I wanted them to see that there was a place in school where their capabilities were valued. I did not know the students who visited at the nursing home, so complete was the turn around in their behaviour. But I now had more concrete evidence of what I had suspected, that their behaviour was, in some measure, a behaviour generated by the institution itself. Paley (1990) wrote about Jason, a student in her class, that he had become for her "the symbol of Every Child's sense of being alone and misunderstood in the classroom. We all know that we are unique; no one else is exactly like you or me. The key that unlocks each one of us is somewhere out there. Who will find it?" (p. 148).

On another occasion my father came to the school and spent the morning helping my students build wooden boxes. I was struck by the intensity of the experience for both the students *and* my father. What was needed in my classroom was an ongoing connection between school and society . We needed a more holistic sense of what it meant to educate. On this day the lines were blurred, who

was the teacher and who was the student? Or, in rethinking the experience, are the words 'teacher' and 'student' even relevant? I felt an even greater sense of urgency to reconceptualize what it meant to educate because I did not want to lose the power of that morning. These experiences are too often considered extra curricular, frills, but on that morning this experience became the essence of what it should mean to educate.

A sense of wonder was awakened beyond the classroom. In school I dealt mainly with either resignation or hostility. How did that sense of wonder or curiosity became a part of what happened in our classroom? How did I create a sense of bringing life and school together? I think that stories played a part here, what they had to say led me in specific curricular directions and the acknowledgement of who they were played a part in breaking down the barriers that had been erected around their ideas about school. Or was it that a sense of themselves emerged as we continually pushed back the boundaries of what it meant to be in school?

Restorying My Life As A Mother/Teacher

There is no place in my initial journal entries for any kind of a life outside of school. My immersion in my return to work felt like drowning. When I surfaced and made contact with family and friends I was driven by my need for reassurance.

> . . . I have this need more than ever now since I started this job of affirmation . . . work is so difficult and I feel so alone that I seem to have more of a need now to connect or at least hear people say, Yeah you're on the right track . . . I suppose you could know something yourself but you . . . need that constant kind of feedback because you don't get if from the children, they just take. (Journal,

December 26, 1990, p. 19)

Schools are not set up to be places for sustained conversations amongst the people who work there. It also took time for me to become a part of the school community. I did find places for sustained conversation and I always felt a renewed sense of purpose after these conversations.

> But building community in a school is a difficult thing and she and I have these snippets of conversation, five minutes at lunch, two minutes in the morning and I thought to myself I want somebody in my room. I need to work with somebody with whom I can discuss everything. You know, just how's it going is a useful question because it shows you care but it doesn't give me the time to sit down and really talk out and come up with alternate plans . . . (Journal, February 2, 1991, p. 54)

> I spent hours talking to my mom about myself and about my work . . . she's able to be so helpful in so many ways in identifying certain behaviours, expectations. . . . And she's able to point out to me things that are strengths that I see as weaknesses and all in all create a real learning experience for me . . . the kind of time that I spent with my mother [is what] I need in my teaching, that kind of intense analysis, that reflection upon your work and yourself, you know, to give you a better understanding of what's happening. And she leaves me feeling positive, she leaves me knowing what it is about myself that hinders my ability to see the positive. Just, just such a good experience and it reminds me of class [at university] when we shared our stories in a very supportive kind of an atmosphere and I don't get it at all at school and that's not to say anything negative about the staff but it just doesn't occur in school period. (Journal, February 19, 1991, p. 71-72)

> I need the intellectual stimulation of a conference where you're prodded or you're patted on the back, where you're made to think through things. And in the classroom . . . you can do that but you do it alone. I just enjoy so much those discussions and that kind of work and miss it very much when I don't get it. (Journal, March 18, 1991, p. 87)

Buried somewhere in my need for reassurance was the question, how do women make sense of their return to work? Initially, getting a job was simply a

matter of juggling another ball. I was a mother and a student, now I would just tack teacher on to this list of roles, or so I thought. The initial problem was in my thinking. The word 'role' is a misnomer for what it is that women do and how they lead their lives. I understood the word 'role' as the assignation of a character. What is not said but certainly exists as part of that definition is the temporary or fleeting nature of the role. As a woman, there is nothing temporary about any of the work that I do. Whatever I do is done, simply, in addition to whatever else I am doing. The struggle to understand who I am has fuelled this thesis and one thing that I have learned is that the notion of 'playing roles' created a sense of fragmentation in my life. My journey to develop a holistic sense of myself as mother/teacher is mirrored in my journal entries as I tried to make sense of my life once I began working.

Along with this, there occurred a slow and often painful process of restructuring family relationships. Overwhelmed by what I had taken on, I found it difficult to nurture. This sense of being overwhelmed also meant that I spent much of my time talking about my work, I took it home with me. Much to the chagrin of my family, my interests were no longer peripheral but rather central to whatever was going on in our family. If it didn't start out that way I soon made it so. Often times my children had to relate to a mother they could no longer understand. I rode an emotional rollercoaster and my life at home bore the brunt of that ride as well as, at times, contributing to that ride. There was no safe place for me to be, no place to scream 'stop' and know that I would be left alone to sort out the mess that was my life. Of course, I did not live my life in a vacuum. But I was afraid of disappearing

altogether before I had forged a new way of being in the world.

> I had too many expectations of what two weeks holiday could do. I thought I could plan all of my teaching work. I thought I could organize my household. I thought I could shop and then we all got sick. And I think that you know my return to work just created so much stress and fatigue that we were all left way too vulnerable. And so I feel like I'm going back and I haven't done anything. (Journal, January 7, 1991, p. 22)

> . . . it must be from fatigue, from frustration from all of those things from all those kinds of things that I do so poorly in my relations with my own children. It's as if all my patience is used up. But I find their activities and their actions so aggravating. And, of course, get angry with my husband, then, because I want him to intercede, I don't want to have to listen. And there's so much in the house that's left undone and in my fatigue this, of course, bothers me greatly. (Journal, January 17, 1991, p. 30)

> I feel pressured because I never know how these children will respond, what the day brings for them as well as for me. And I feel very pressured because my own child . . . has real problems. I'm sure that they existed before and my return to work after all these years has aggravated them. (Journal, January 21, 1991, p. 35)

> But I can't continue to feel like this. This stress and gagging . . . and nerves, bad nerves on the one hand and then this overwhelming fatigue on the other. I wonder which will win out? (Journal, January 27, 1991, p. 37)

It was within the school, itself, where I began to work out a new 'self' understanding. What I am about to describe I do not have a name for and that is the sense I made of the unwritten, unspoken attitudes towards family that existed in the school where I worked. I do not mean their personal sense of what it meant to be a part of a family but rather their sense of how home and school came together in their professional lives. This staff honoured their family connections by making them a part of life at school. The lines between home and school were somewhat blurred. Husbands, wives, children, and relatives peopled our school and

classrooms from time to time. They helped out in whatever way was appropriate at the time. What I remember the most clearly was the acceptance by all of the staff of this interconnectedness and indeed, the apparent normalcy of these comings and goings. This was new to me and initially I found it unusual. In retrospect the people with whom I worked had developed a more holistic sense of what it meant to teach than I had and this was one way of living out their understanding of their 'selves.'

It took me awhile to figure out what was happening but as soon as I grasped the significance of their undertaking I, too, joined in and my family became connected to my teaching. My husband and daughter accompanied us on a ski trip. My daughter came to school and spent the day with my class. My father prepared woodworking projects for us and on one occasion came to the school to spend a morning with my students to help them put together one of these projects. My mother and father accompanied my class on a day long field trip. My family accompanied me to visit a student's family while they were exhibiting their prize birds at a show. My mother, father and daughter accompanied me to a Powwow where we enjoyed an evening put on by the Native Parents' Council.

These seemingly isolated events had a profound effect on me. They helped me to develop a holistic sense of myself as mother/teacher. They integrated my life inside and outside of school. The cultural images of teachers and mothers "do not reflect the real, alive people we know who struggle with gracefully combining multiple identities and making sense out of their world" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 63).

This is the same dilemma I constructed earlier in the description of events in

my classroom. Schools are isolated from society. Much of my students' behaviour was a reaction to the institution; they saw it as removed from their lives. Schools can have that same effect on teachers. How fortunate for me to find work in a school that exhibited such a sense of personal/professional 'wholeness.' Perhaps it is this integration that allowed me the space to pursue this sense of 'wholeness' in my classroom.

I am all too aware that the story of my return to work can be misconstrued. Do I want to share my story when I know there are those who will find justification for bypassing mothers in the hiring process? Why should I let you, the reader, be a part of this journey? By blurring the distinctions between family life and work, women are characterized as lacking commitment and attachment toward their professional lives, there is little interest in how teachers conceptualize their work, professional goals and maturation (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 69). I see strength rather than weakness in the blurring of distinctions and it is time that teachers voiced the reality of their work. Each one of us does not experience our work in the same way but there are connections we can make so as to build a more realistic picture of what it means to teach and how we envision the future. Martin (1982) called for a redefinition of 'teaching' and 'education'. "When analyses of the concept of teaching take childrearing activities to be central, insight into that prime educational process will be increased. When the activities of family living and childrearing fall within the range of worthwhile activities, theories of curriculum will be more complete" (p. 148).

There is a complexity, indeed, messiness to my story that highlights two

important factors in teaching. First of all there is the complexity of the work that we do as teachers and the understanding that we bring our whole 'self' to our work. The second factor is the morality of teaching. Piaget cited in Lyons (1990) stated that "apart from our relations to other people, there can be no moral necessity" (p. 69). Our lives inside and outside of school are defined by relationships. My story is about the feelings evoked by my expanding circle of relationships.

In this context, then, I am willing to talk about fatigue. Fatigue was always present in my story. Sometimes it is momentarily forgotten or, at least, pushed into the background but in the final analysis it was a constant in my journal. Sometimes it was a positive signal. It meant I was relaxed, I had moved beyond merely coping.

> They were working on an art project making dinosaurs from geometric shapes. And they were sitting at their desks tracing and cutting and they started chatting and for the first time they talked to one another. There was no punching, shoving, no name calling, none of that horrid sexual language that they use to bring one another down. . . . But what it did to me was it made me so tired. For once I felt that we were moving onto a different plane, you know, a different level of activity. And I started to relax, I realized I didn't have to be on my guard, I didn't have to be stressed. I wasn't going to have to run and break up a fight. I wasn't going to have to discipline. And something started to drain from my body in such a major way I could hardly stay awake . . . I slept wonderfully and that's why I'm late this morning. (Journal, January 24, 1991, p. 39)

At other times, though, it was a signal that I was overwhelmed with all that I was trying to do. It became the physical manifestation of my inability to be all things to all people. The idea of 'superwoman' was fixed in my mind when I first returned to work. I honestly thought I could do everything, "social and cultural

images let us distort present realities, negate the dynamics and complexities of people's lives today" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 44). I was awash in our culture's notion that I only needed to be better organized to bring order to my life. This oversimplifies what it is women do and how it is they do it. My search for a holistic 'self' image can be seen in a more historical sense where women chose teaching because it was "work devoted to the problems and concerns that the woman herself faces in her private capacity within the family" (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 69). As the months passed I began to develop a different, more holistic sense of 'self' and my restorying centered on my 'self' as a mother/teacher.

It was one thing to have different ideas about the life and learning in my classroom, it was another thing to work out those ideas, to bring together the theoretical and the practical. I drew a lot of my strength from the fact that I had been able to help my own children. I had faith in myself as a mother and this provided the foundation of my practice. It provided a sense of hope when I felt hopeless. Much of what I did in the classroom was based on an understanding of learning that I had constructed over time with my daughters. Theory was enmeshed with how they lived their lives as students and how we hoped together that they could live their lives as students.

> Just yesterday morning Adam told me that he liked this writing stories . . . When I'm with these children I think of my daughter often and I wish I could do this for her because I think she would be so appreciative of it and I feel that these children aren't. (Journal, January 28, 1991, p. 48)

Even though I do not perceive that the children were appreciative I was able to persist because I knew how important this would be to my daughter and what a

difference it would make for her. This kind of knowing was helpful in my work. I continued to experiment with various forms of writing until the children themselves came to see what it was that writing could be for them. Some of them took to journals, others to story and in the end we were all writing.

> I've decided to get a basket to put them [journals] all in with another basket beside it. And the children could choose to write whenever it is they want, put it in the other basket and then I'll know it's time to respond. And one of the children saw me put them out and said, "Oh I need my journal I want to write something." (Journal, February 11, 1991, p. 63)

> How The Birch Tree Got Its Stripes (Ahenakew, 1988) was the book we read and I decided they like it so much we'll write our own. . . . And it was Kenny who sat at his desk and said two very profound things this morning. First of all he said, "why am I writing so much?" He had pages, by his standards, of written material. And I told him . . . he had lots of good ideas that he wanted to get down. Now he seemed pleased with all of that. And everyone was so busy, so intent on this. The next thing he said was, "why is it so quiet in here?" And it was another time when we worked as a class on a project, people moved around the room, people talked to one another but they talked about what they were doing or the paper they were using or something related to this. It felt so 'normal.' And I thought wow what potential here, [to] develop writing in this way as a group, you know, working together, sharing ideas, sharing books, sharing paper, sharing, sharing. It was so wonderful. And Adam wouldn't quit as usual . . . when he gets into something and it was lunchtime and I was trying to get him out of there and I think wow they're so absorbed.(Journal, May 23, 1991, p. 128-129)

Imperative to my understanding of myself as a teacher was my more basic conceptualization of what it meant to be a human being. And in giving consideration to these ideas it became apparent that I was developing a holistic vision, one that did not separate children from adults. Becoming a parent was, for me, the beginning of this journey, ". . . individual human development, as any mother knows, is a wilderness path, free and risky, cyclic and often apparently

erratic, not linear and systematic" (Dooley et al, 1988-89, p. 23).

I cannot write my story of teaching without talking about love. But love is not a word that is used very much in the literature on teaching practice. It is a word that has been used too casually and exploited for monetary gain in our society (Greenberg, 1974). Still it is at the root of my understanding of children, of human beings, their need to love and be loved. The author Avi is quoted by Calkins (1991), "[i]f you can convince your children that you love them, then there's nothing you can't teach them" (p. 11). Noddings' (1984) 'ethic of caring' is a way of stating what it is I am trying to write. My work in the classroom centered on developing relationships because it is in relationships that we experience human caring, and the "memory of caring and being cared for" is universal (Noddings, 1984, p. 1). What I experienced with my own children was the development of a relationship where being present to one another was the most important component. It is the model of relationship that I carried with me into the classroom. The dilemma in this understanding, when I brought it with me to school, was that "the values we cherish are those within and between individual human beings . . . institutions deal instead with the mass. By their very nature, the preservation of the institution takes precedence over the preservation and well-being of the individual" (Greenberg, 1974, p. 206).

As I engaged in a reconstruction of my image of myself as a teacher there were more moments of doubt than assurance that I was on the right path but what was most interesting to me was the fact that I did not radically alter my way of being in the classroom. While my image of myself was unclear and even confused

in my own mind, there was a central core to this image that never wavered. It was simply that I could not be otherwise, I was a mother who now taught. In moments of doubt this thought frightened me because there would be no one to fault but myself for the problems I was experiencing. But when the students responded to this central core of my image I had a sense that I was on the right track and that perseverance was necessary. I had faith that they would respond in time but I sometimes lacked faith in the 'rightness' of what it was I was trying to do.

My image of myself emerged as various incidents came along to test it. Often we do not know what we know until we speak it aloud. In a similar way I could not verbalize how I conceptualized my teaching image until it was sorely tested by goings-on in my classroom or it was highlighted by a moment of profound connection between the students and myself.

What also helped my development as a teacher of this class was reminding myself that a classroom is peopled by individuals. Each child's response to me was unique and the variety of responses provided me with many different ways to assess my growth as a teacher. As I began to articulate my image of myself as a teacher I could look back on how it was each child responded. I had to stop making blanket statements about my work and begin the process of looking at my work within each relationship that I was developing in the classroom. It was more than merely focussing on the positive rather than the negative. It was the beginning of an assessment of work as a teacher that was, for the first time, consistent with my image of myself as a teacher. It was helpful to me because it offered me specific rather than general feedback about my work. This is the core of morality in

teaching, my relationships with my students.

When I looked at my work from different vantage points I was often overwhelmed by a feeling of ineffectiveness. Was their growth reflected in standardized testing? Was their behaviour on the playground indicative of their behaviour in the classroom? These indicators and my work centered on different understandings of these children.

At times I felt incapable of making a difference as a teacher of these children. The children's responses to me, as our relationships developed, were mixed yet I saw the possibility. There was not one, simple answer or plan for how to proceed in the classroom, that would arise from our developing relationships.

> I'm remembering . . . [a] friend who's teaching and she was scrambling at one point, for materials, looking for the answer and it occurred to me . . . we are all in a way looking for that. There's got to be something I can do that will make this work every day. I think . . . in a classroom you hope for that or you think it. And of course when you step back from the classroom you realize that it isn't possible, that you're dealing with so many individuals and so many combinations of individuals that it [the answer] just isn't a reality in the classroom. But it would sure make your life a lot simpler as an educator. (Journal, February 11, 1991, p. 61)

Love, like caring, is universally experienced. While I argued this point when I started teaching I came to understand it differently when I listened to my students. My understanding was not an inclusive but rather an exclusive understanding, if you have not experienced loving (caring) as I have then you have not experienced it. I was not listening to their stories, I was imposing my understanding upon the stories they told. Caring can be expressed in many ways. Nor did I initially understand their response to me as a response to their understanding of the institution and so I interpreted their behaviour as an inability to

enter into a caring relationship. They became the teachers as we worked through their understanding of what it meant to be in relation, to be loved (cared for). I needed to enter the child's outlook and speech to grasp how that child understood his world. By being open, by becoming a listener, I came to realize that these children had indeed structured an understanding of loving (caring) based on their primary relationship, that of mother-child.

Working Together In The Classroom

As we became a community our work together developed into something meaningful for all of us. I think there was a correlation between the children's increasing comfort with their 'self' discoveries and their ability to reach out to one another, to help one another. This is not something I could engineer as a teacher, my efforts to do this were, at best, short-lived. I was always struck by the authenticity of the situation, the seriousness with which the students approached their work together. My part in all of this had been to create a classroom atmosphere for this kind of sharing.

> Dennis . . . got angry with Adam when he pretend[ed] he was beating a drum and he was beating his looseleaf binder and Dennis told him that that wasn't the proper thing to do, you know, that he was making fun of his own cultural heritage. (Journal, January 18, 1991, p. 35)

> While we were writing our letters to the friends at the nursing home Adam started acted a bit silly and I didn't have to say a thing, the boys were so annoyed with him that he would even attempt to act silly and to think he could be silly when he's visiting the nursing home. . . . And he was severely reprimanded, I remember by Dennis but I think there were others, about his behaviour and his language when he visited the nursing home. I mean I was so impressed at the sincerity and the seriousness of what Dennis was

telling him and I think in the end that it worked. We won't know, of course, until a week from tomorrow but I think Adam will learn the lesson better when he feels that kind of pressure from his peers. (Journal, February 21, 1991, p. 78).

For the third time since I've started teaching this class, two students decided to work together. This is such a break through . . . Kenny and Roger worked together on their multiplication yesterday and were really helpful to one another. I just wish we had more of this, it's very slow in coming. . . . They're very possessive of their work and their ideas. . . (Journal, March 4, 1991, p. 91-92)

. . . last Friday and we were making posters for the library book sale and Kenny said to Miles, "you can't draw" or "you don't know how to draw", I forget which one, but he didn't say it maliciously he was just passing comment,any other time . . . would have been malicious, making fun of, and this time it wasn't. And then he went on and said, you should ask you mom for drawing lessons. Well we kept working and Miles took it in the way it was intended, just as a statement of fact or information or whatever you want to call it. Then about 10, 15 minutes later Kenny said, I'm gonna give you drawing lessons Miles and he mentioned that a couple of times, that he decided he was goin' to teach Miles how to draw. And at the time I didn't even realize the impact, I mean these are children who didn't even get along, who fought . . . and it's interesting because after that Miles continued to work on his poster . . . and my it was lovely, I mean it was so colorful and creative . . . and I wondered if just this boost from his peer, . . . it isn't that you can't draw it's just that you haven't had lessons yet to try, you know his interpretation of it. It was a powerful moment. (Journal, April 29, 1991, p. 118)

. . . it was so good to see and hear Miles and Kenny reading to one another and helping one another and enjoying the story with one another. And now you know that everything in the literature about this is true, I mean it was a wonderful experience. Dennis read to me and he liked that too. But it's this pairing of students that is far more powerful but it's taken us this long to get there. (Journal, April 29, 1991, p. 118)

Dennis did some editing for Kenny, . . . he used win when he should have said beat and Dennis corrected him. And he listened, he didn't change it on his paper but he listened and I thought oh this is the first time we've done this kind of peer editing, you know, where they would help one another and I'm really tempted on Monday to have them share their stories with one another. . . . But I don't want to step in because I find that that just dampens the

> enthusiasm to the point where they don't want to write. But I wonder if they're doing it for one another if it would be different. So I'll have to see how I feel about that on Monday morning and whether I want to take that extra step. [Also] they really were helpful to one another with spelling. And they are so fearful of making a spelling error and it's teacher spell this, teacher spell that, but so often this time it's do you spell it this way or how do you spell this and then somebody, usually Dennis, would give his attempt at the spelling and I thought wow this is good. (Journal, May 23, 1991, p. 129-130)

There was an evaluative dimension to these stories that was important to me. The measurement of the work done was only one, small facet. What was of more importance to me was the emotional tone of this work. This spoke to the emergence of a new understanding of how we could live and learn together in the classroom.

Laughter also gave me a sense of the relational quality of our work together.

> My class had it's first honest to goodness enjoyable laugh. Dennis had left his . . . sandwich on the seat of his desk and when he came back in the room he forgot it was there and he sat on it. He was very good-natured about it and I felt for the first time that nobody was laughing at anyone they were just laughing with. It was one of those humourous situations that everyone enjoyed. (Journal, January 21, 1991, p. 36)

> They love the Abiyoyo (Seeger, 1986) story, they just love it. I have the . . . tape and of course he sings on it as well as tells the story . . . for the first time today [the students] took parts. . . . They enjoyed the imitations and there was some wonderful laughter, not the kind that hurts people just the wonderful kind of laughter. (Journal, February 11, 1991, p. 61-62)

Restorying Community: A Sense Of Home

After a few months, my work was characterized by a different emotional response to activities both within my classroom and the school. I think the biggest

change was in the growth of a sense of community. My relationships with my students and with my fellow staff members continued developing to the point where I felt connected. This sense of connection freed me, it helped to break down the sense of isolation that I felt about my work, an isolation born of my frustrations in the classroom. I felt that I was going nowhere because of the children's responses but there also existed a self-imposed isolation, the fear of talking about my work because I thought that no other teacher told their story as I did. I had returned to teaching with the idea, as expressed by Britzman (1986), that "[d]espite the reality that teachers share collective problems, in this individual world, asking for help is viewed as a sign of weakness" (p. 445). There is no clear cut division, no day when suddenly my life was turned around, and yet there is a sense of a difference in my journal.

> What a wonderful day [of skiing]! I enjoyed the children. The staff are remarkable and we just had so much fun. I enjoyed the parents. To me this is just a highlight, I just had a fantastic time . . . that's what education is, to be open to all these possibilities, to show the children that I'm open to them and boy did we have a good time. And on this day they were my teachers . . . it was just a highly successful day. I just loved every minute of it. (Journal, February 26, 1991, p. 84)

> I've just been thinking about why I'm more relaxed, what has changed . . . I think I've met the extremes with this class. I was thinking I know how low we can go and I know how high we can go. And it creates for me a zone, like a comfort zone so I know we can bottom out here or I know we can peak here or I know we can work somewhere in between. But I think for the longest time I didn't know what we were capable of in both extremes . . . I was always walking on glass never knowing . . . so now I'm more comfortable. The other thing that's happened is that we don't have extremes and I'm speaking here particularly of bottoming out. We don't have extremes . . . that carry on. (Journal, March 2, 1991, p. 89)

> Now I have a class that doesn't argue about settling down to work. Now I have a class that finishes their work. Now I have a class that I can have discussions with. Now I have a class who understands more other people's behaviour and problems and is more willing to leave them be with that so that [each] person can work out [his] problems. (Journal, March 12, 1991, p. 94)

> The nice part [of parent-teacher interviews] was really feeling a part of this school. Having staff members stop in for a chat, going to other people's rooms or the staff room and having some time to talk . . . [to] parents I've met on various field trips or through school activities. And it just felt so comfortable . . .why do I want to work anywhere else? (Journal, March 12, 1991, p. 99)

> . . .There's a certain calm about my return to work . . . there's a sense now of routine, there's a sense of knowing the kids and, well, knowing the school. So I return with this . . . awful cold that I've had for a month now, yet I feel a certain calm, I don't have that nervous energy about what the day will bring . . . I can anticipate what that will be. (Journal, April 8, 1991, p. 100)

These events or feelings did not simply occur on the days that I have indicated. There is an emerging sense of community in my writing prior to these journal entries. But my sense of isolation and the seeming randomness of events slowly gave way to a new way of being both in the school and in the classroom. I felt connected to the staff and the students. And this sense of connection was reciprocated. This is the time when I decided that I could, indeed, teach again. It was as if the long and arduous climb to the top of the mountain was finally over and I had reached the summit.

Connections amongst the staff were particularly important and the staff offered their support to me in my work. I had not worked in a school like this one before. I often understood their comments as expectations and, in the dilemma that this created for me, I was seen but not heard. But communication and support amongst staff members were important features of life in this school and the

administrators, on several occasions, arranged for me to spend time in conversation with my co-workers. One of my fellow staff members became a kindred spirit as we shared the personal, our stories of returning to work, of mothering and teaching. Another staff member became my professional soul-mate as we shared the ups and downs of our work.

> We started talking . . . her story is remarkably similar to mine, secondary trained, home for twelve years, two daughters who were about the same ages as mine when she returned to work . . . with this we connected and I feel like I have someone who understands . . . (Journal, January 14, 1991, handwritten)

> . . . she sat down and we had a long talk about whole language and how we felt about it and both of us feel very strongly about it's implementation in the class room and the importance of whole language. And yet we struggle so with, how do you do it. . . . But it was a wonderful discussion to take part in first of all because you're not alone and you know that now and so you can kind of lay it out on the table and see what you can do about it. Second of all, knowing that you have somewhere that you can go for help even if it's to one another and the help isn't particularly effective, at least you know somebody who's thinking like you. (Journal, April 11, 1991, p. 107)

Later in the year I was to engage in joint planning with another teacher that revolved around paired reading activities. I found this work to be helpful. It allowed for conversation about what was happening in our classrooms and this led to ongoing, shared, informal evaluation of our students. This was not done in a systematic way, there was no time in the school day for that. Rather, it was snippets of conversations during 'found' moments of a busy school day. No matter, this is exactly what I needed in my teaching and it provided both a sense of professional well-being and growth as we worked together.

As my work in the classroom took shape I became more articulate about

what I felt should be happening. It was another indication of the sense of belonging that I felt.

> We also have a student teacher in our school and she has a special education background. We have talked briefly about behaviour modification programs and I am surprised at how articulate I have become about my program. Somehow I have surfaced from the darkened depths to the light of day; I have gone from survival in the classroom to living in the classroom. (Journal, March 24, 1991, p. 3)

I also experienced this sense of being articulate during parent-teacher interviews. I only met with a few parents which was disappointing to me because I felt that parents had an integral role to play in their children's education and I needed their help to continue with my work. My difficulties in establishing communication with all of the parents made me wonder what stories they had to tell about school. Like the children and myself they, too, had deeply embedded understandings of the place and purpose of schools in their own lives and the lives of their children. It was also during these times of parental involvement that my emerging image of myself became that of a mother/teacher. I could not sort out my responses as that of a mother or that of a teacher, my words were those of a mother/teacher.

> At the very last moment I became nervous about parent-teacher interviews but that feeling didn't last long. I know something about these children and for some of them I think that I cannot do much more without parental input . . . I look at those parents sitting across from or beside me and I listen. I am haunted by all my time on the other side of the desk. I hear myself speaking. When I do not hear myself I am listening to someone else's story. It is difficult to make sense of all of it but there are parts with which I can empathize. And what do you do? Her construction of reality is so profoundly different than the reality that I have constructed for her. [It is another teacher who is so helpful here as we talk this over.] This woman is doing all that she can to be a mother, she is doing the best

> with what she knows. It seems most of the time that we are having parallel dialogues rather than a conversation. We continue. Am I making any sense to her? Does she wonder the same about me? (Journal, March 24, 1991, p. 4)

All of these contexts provided an opportunity for my voice to be heard. As I look back through my journal this development seemed tied to a developing sense of community in both the school and my classroom. So it was that I could reach a place in my journey that would be considered home, a place exemplified by a sense of unity, togetherness, and shared meanings.

My life at home also came to take on more routine look and this added to my sense of well-being. But like my classroom there were still ups and downs. At work, though, I was better able to make sense of what was happening, at home I still rode the rollercoaster.

> And when I came home it was so nice that they had eaten,they were fed, relaxed, doing their homework. I just made what it was I wanted for supper, my husband looked after himself and the evening just proceeded from there. I guess it's just taken two months for all of us to settle in, to kind of figure out a routine. I'm not saying that my daughter . . . is much happier about this but the fact is we do seem to be coming to terms with my being at work. (Journal, February 20, 1991, p. 75).

> We had an especially nice weekend. We did things together as a family, little bit of shopping, went out for dinner. And I realized that one of the reasons it was such a nice time is because I was not carrying that monkey on my back, all that tension and stress that builds in my shoulders and I carry there and it felt really good. (Journal, March 4, 1991, p. 91)

> I feel guilty because it says on the note to have your child there and of course I cannot have my child there. She has to do it on her own and I know there's many parents that do it but I guess having been home and having supported her through all of this I feel like I'm somehow deserting her. It feels terrible and so I hang around fixing this and doing that. And now as I drive to work I think what good did it do anyway? It would be easier to stay home, do everything

> for everybody, but then nobody grows. I become a mental wreck like I was before I went back to university. . . . And I'm happy, I like going to work. (Journal, March 12, 1991, p. 96)

I experienced a dilemma, how was I to care for others and care for myself? In a conversation with my kindred spirit we mulled over this dilemma. The dilemma arose, we thought, from the way in which we had lived our lives. After being at home with our children for twelve years we were now trying to restructure these relationships. We understood this restructuring as putting ourselves first. Was that possible, we wondered? We didn't find any answers.

> And I don't think anything ever changes at home, it's just that I get better at turning it off or screaming it out or just walking away. I don't know if that's good or bad but that's the way it is. (Journal, May 15, 1991, p. 122)

An Emerging Image Of Mother/Teacher

Events that occurred during a Phys. Ed. class told the story of my emerging sense of myself as a mother/teacher. Roger was punched in the face by Dennis. What prompted the punch in the face had been construed by Roger as a gesture of friendship but had been understood by Dennis as an act of aggression that demanded an immediate, even more aggressive response. There was so much I still did not know about these children and I was troubled by their inability to get past this knee jerk kind of a response to one another. It was their untold stories that dictated this kind of a response.

Roger sat on the gym floor sobbing from both emotional and physical pain. He could not be consoled but he would, at least, sit with me. And in those minutes that we sat together his face blurred and I felt that I was talking to my daughter.

Something in the way his sobs caught in his throat, in the way his voice mirrored his pain, in his sense of betrayal by someone he thought was a friend left me unable to 'see' his face, so blurred I could have been at home with my daughter, helping her through a difficult experience. The kind of experience that brings your child bravely through the door after school only to have them fall to pieces as soon as the door closes. An insult of such magnitude that they are afraid of the power of their own response, afraid, that is, until they connect with their mother and know that it is alright to let go, to release the pain. They need both the physical comforting and the sense-making that you can offer. And he responded in the same way my daughter responded. Slowly a sense of calm returned, the sobs no longer caught in his throat. He heard me. I do not know what sense he made of my explanation but for the moment, anyway, it helped. When I called his father to explain what had happened his father willingly provided a context for Roger's response. It was a scenario I had experienced with my own children and I did not hesitate to respond as a parent. There was a sense of 'wholeness' in my response that truly served his son. It proved to be an 'educational' moment for all of us.

This first, telling moment of a blurred image was instructive to me because it was in the blurring that I sensed my 'self', both mother and teacher acting as a unity. My response to this child's pain was, in fact, born of many years of 'knowing', knowing of and in the body as I lived in relationship with my daughters. It was here that I recovered my ability to intuit, to know without words. In a situation of true connection something emanates from the body, there is something beyond the words that 'tells' our story.

Even when our stories were untold or disconnected, as were the stories that the children and I brought to the classroom, I think that it was in this 'bodily' knowing that we connected. It is somehow in this nonverbal way that we established the climate of trust that would eventually give us the opportunity to tell our stories and look for connections.

There is no 'method' of creating classroom communities. The 'method' is something we carry in our bodies and therefore is unique to each teacher. This is of particular importance because children are adept at 'reading' what it is our bodies tell them. When children are asked whether or not they like a teacher, they answer simply yes or no. When asked to explain their answer, to give reasons, they are often not able to do so. A child responds, "I don't know, I just do." They have connected with the teacher at this non-verbal level and 'read' into their developing relationship the kind of caring that will allow them to simply be. In this context, then, what becomes of prime importance is the teacher's own sense of 'self.' This sense of 'self' underlies reflective practice.

Just as I brought school work home with me I also brought my 'home work' to school with me. At times the workload of home and the workload of school blurred into one overwhelming problem. I felt like a mother/teacher and it was the collective problems that this image presented that were overwhelming me. I again felt like I was drowning except this time I reached out to my colleagues and they offered me the support and help that I needed to make sense of my life and, indeed, get my work done.

> I arrive a wreck and go home calm. . . .What is happening that I come to school that way and I leave so relaxed at the end of the day?

(Journal, February 12, 1991, p. 66)

> I arrived at work yesterday morning in a state, that's the only way to describe it. I couldn't stop crying, I was upset by what was happening at home and the amount of work I had to do. Immediately one teacher offered to take my class to the assembly so I could . . . get myself together. A second teacher, when I talked . . . about . . . these reading tests I had to administer, said just send them [students not involved in testing] to my room, which I did. And therefore I was able to finish . . . I thought now . . . this is wonderful. A third teacher . . . came down to my room later in the day to see that everything was ok. And a fourth teacher who happened to stop in my room, as she does often, . . . [was] also very empathetic and that's, I think, what it means to teach, to be in a community. [I]t was just so wonderful to get back on my feet so quickly with their help. (Journal, May 28, 1991, p. 133)

Lessons From My Students

There is so much that I learned from my students. The lessons they taught me were both verbal and non-verbal, some were immediately evident and some took time for me to figure out.

> They're much more willing to get at 'work' now but the time we spent making the papier mâché puppets was such a fiasco. I find it so disturbing when their behaviour is so poor and yet they can come in after recess, I can speak my piece about their behaviour and I can be very annoyed with them. They listen and then we move on. I think that's important, the lesson for me there is not to punish, because to punish after that episode with the papier mâché [would] only intensify their anger. They just need to be told it was wrong and then we need to move on. And so the rest of the afternoon [for]whatever was left . . . they used the computer, they used the Lego and they were pleased as punch that they got to do this and they were very good students. I mean they talked to one another and they had a few laughs. (Journal, February 22, 1991, p. 79)

> Kenny and Roger worked together on their multiplication yesterday and were really helpful to one another. I just wish we had more of this, it's very slow in coming. They're very possessive of their work and their ideas . . . 'I want it just for me' . . . whatever it is I do...it's just [do it with me] and nobody else. I need to think about this more because it's telling me something about these children.

(Journal, March 4, 1991, p. 92)

The use of rewards is common in elementary school classrooms. They are used to reward both appropriate behaviour and learning. I make this point simply to move this discussion beyond the special education classroom. How is it that children perceive these 'rewards?' It was my students' interpretations of these rewards that brought to light the underlying issues. What did it say about the worth of what I was teaching if I had to 'bribe' the children to engage with the material? And what did receiving/not receiving a reward tell the child about himself? And even if the children went along with the idea, how did the children feel when someone else got a much sought after prize and they did not? There is an assumption here that children think differently than adults. They do not. I do not want to be continually compared to my peers, but implicit in rewards is comparison. I want to be treated as an individual with my own particular strengths and weaknesses.

Children have come to expect rewards for their work because it is such a commonplace practice. It was an expectation of the students in my class. They often asked, what do I get for doing this?

> . . . when they asked what the prize was for solving the puzzles I said it was just for the . . . thrill of solving the puzzle and they continued working on those. (Journal, February 20, 1991, p. 76)

They sent me a mixed message because when they were truly engaged there was no need for a reward.

I resisted for some time but the pressure of my own and others' expectations for my class, along with the pressure exerted by the students, changed

my mind. On the surface it appeared that the reward system I instituted was working. But, as noted in my journal, there was a disturbing side to these rewards.

> The only way I think that you can really truly get to the bottom of a behaviour disorder is to hear the story, to understand what it is that makes that child tick and then to help the child to understand what it is that makes him tick . . . I can learn all the tricks . . . I [can] have . . . the checkmarks and the posters and the rewards but to me that's surface you know and some of us can do it and some of us can't, some people are more successful at it than I am but I think if you're going to do anything that's helpful in the long run it has to be to dig to the bottom. (Journal, February 25, 1991, p. 83)

> We had a terrible incident yesterday with stealing . . . I don't know why he's doing this and then I think, yes maybe I do. That in order to motivate these children I've had to use a reward system and I put this off for a long time but it just became necessary in order for me to function in the classroom. And I've been using it for . . . six or seven weeks. And I've come up with a new prize because it's marble season and I think there was so much envy of this prize, and the person who had it, that he stole it. I think too that a lot of Dennis' . . . outbursts stem from his perception that he is losing one of his bonus marks whether he did or not . . . But he acts out almost as if to challenge me or maybe that is what he's doing, he's challenging me. (Journal, March 13, 1991, p. 97)

I was already using what I thought were more meaningful 'rewards.' We started bi-monthly visitations at the nursing home and the students were working as helpers in other classrooms. This allowed for the development of relationships that I thought were important for the students. The students became valued members of particular school communities as well as valued members of the larger community. To me, these were authentic rewards and ones that rewarded the 'whole' student. Initially, it was difficult for some of the students to accept these rewards. They did not believe their status as valued members of a community, but their difficulty was only a reflection of their self-doubt, their troubled 'self' understanding.

The work itself became their reward. They loved what they did. When we

did receive commendation for our work in the community from the school board the class accepted it quite matter-of-factly. I was more excited that the students. They had not done this to get a prize and their reward was an ongoing one because it existed in the relationships which they had developed. My expectations, then, for these particular programs were met. They were a manifestation of what I believed should be happening in my classroom.

It was the staff who had suggested to me that one way they could help me out was to use students in my classroom as helpers in their particular programs. When the students were able to exercise some responsibility for their behaviour and their work they would be able to leave the room and work as a helper in another class. This approach to rewards had another benefit. It allowed me to be flexible and to respond to each child's developing sense of our work together. Initially Adam was not a part of this program, he would not shoulder any responsibility.

> Roger and Adam chose to get into a bit of name calling and were much slower to finish their work. And of course were not allowed to use the Lego which made Adam very angry. But I said he knew the consequences and he has to deal with them. He's still at the stage, of course, of blaming me for everything. (Journal, February 11, 1991, p. 63)

But there were moments when I glimpsed the possibility of our work together. It was these glimpses that prompted me to make Adam a classroom helper. If I had waited for some kind of sustained change in his behaviour I risked losing him altogether.

> Today the class prepared a snack and what a to-do but when . . . the day was over . . . he came to me and said, "thank you very much for letting us prepare a snack" and then he said "thank you for sharing yours with me" because I let him eat my fruit cup. And there it was, unsolicited, out of the blue, so thoughtful. They

always amaze me. (Journal, March 4, 1991, p. 92)

He needed a place to be himself and the kindergarten room proved to be that place.

> He loves to go to that kindergarten room and play, he needs to play . . . it's true, you know, . . . he loves the Lego, he spends hours building things, he loves me to sing to him, he loves to go to the kindergarten room and read to them . . . 'cause that's at his level and do water play and everything else. And he's very good at all of this. Now what is school for? . . . that sure isn't the school that 99.9% of the population have in mind when they hear the word. But isn't that meeting the needs of the student, you know, and how do you define that? I mean if you only meet the needs of the student in terms of the prescribed curriculum then you may miss out on a lot of those needs. (Journal, June 21, 1991, p. 149-150)

Another successful reward for the students was one that they, themselves, built into their work in mathematics. They loved the challenge of bettering their time as they practiced multiplication tables. They recorded this along with the number of questions they had completed and the number of questions done correctly. They took great pleasure in this recording and spent time with one another discussing the improvement in their work. There was no competition between the students, rather there was camaraderie amongst the students as they went about their work.

Restorying My Understanding Of Evaluation

In the context of our classroom community, how could the children's learning be evaluated? The stories that we told about our work together served, for me, as a form of evaluation. It was through stories that I was able to connect academic progress and the students developing sense of 'self.' These stories also served to contextualize our knowing.

I suggested [they] might be ready to go back to their grade four class and they got very upset. I let it go after we just talked a little bit and Dennis said, I think we're just getting . . . to be such good students . . . (Journal, February 22, 1991, p. 78)

I am so happy each time he and I work together because Adam now sees himself as a reader. I have had glimpses of this in the past but last week was the turning point. He went to the library and found two books that he could read. One he could read with no difficulty and the other book required some practice but in both cases he chose the book because he determined that he could read the story. And read them he did along with other books that I had borrowed from the grade one teacher. But the best evidence came yesterday. Adam and Kenny were disciplined for their behaviour in Phys. Ed.and put back in the classroom. I was not involved in this but it was my prep and I happened on the scene when I returned to my classroom for something. I immediately left. On my second trip back for something I approached the door and found Adam reading all of his books to Kenny! I was so happy—I quietly backed away from the door and left them alone to read to one another. Wow! Imagine how he must feel. He wasn't reading to me. I wasn't asking him to read. He did it on his own. And so it is official on May 6, 1991 Adam became a reader. . . . Now Adam is reading and we had a most enjoyable half hour working on beginning sounds. He is ready for the finer points but we will not stop reading to do this. The look of satisfaction on his face tells the story. (May 7, 1991, p. 129)

Dennis took out Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Dahl, 1964) from the library last week. . . . When he first signed out the book its significance escaped me. But he had never taken out a novel before. I couldn't believe my own ears . . . that day . . . when I was actually asking him to put the book away. . . . Those words caught in my throat—I had spent so much time encouraging them to read, listening to them read, and reading to them for this very moment and now I was asking him to put the book away. . . . No complaints that it is too long or has too many words. He wants to read . . . I am sure a literature rich environment had something to do with this. . . . But it is not something that can be measured and it is here that I fall down. I cannot reduce this story to a grade. (Journal, May 7, 1991, p. 10-11)

Another wonderful thing happened today. Adam came back from the library period, it's my prep, but he came into the room and said I found five books I can read and I can only take out one, will you take out the other four for me? Well of course I will, I'm just

> thrilled that he's finding these books and saying that I can read. I mean that was his big thing when I met him, I can't read, you'll have to read it to me.
>
> I put . . . verses on the board to be looked up. . . . Not only did he look it up, he read it. And there was never any question about whether he would or he would not read it, he just read it. . . . It was just wonderful, miraculous to see that moment when he didn't even think. . . . I can just imagine this scenario a few months ago. I can't read, you can't make me do this, you give me work that's too hard and here he was. Oh it was such a quiet, wonderful moment as he read that to the class . . . they didn't even pass comment . . . not only does he see himself as a reader but the others see him as a reader too. This is so important. (Journal, May 15, 1991, p. 123)

Connecting Learning With Teaching

There was a comfortable feeling in the classroom and I felt the students' trust in me. We had become a community of readers and the time was right to move into more specific reading skills, I knew that the students were ready for this. What I was not prepared for was the angry reaction of my students to the 'form' of this work.

> . . . we did some phonics and we were working, on syllables, from their phonics workbook. Now last week I pulled out their phonics books and they all just went crazy when they saw the book but there's some things in there that we can use from time to time. So today I went through, took out all the appropriate sheets and when it came time to work on this just gave them the sheet, we did half of it together and they did half of it. And they loved it, there was no problem at all. They just have that phobia, I suppose, when they see the ol' workbook comin' out. (Journal, April 23, 1991, p. 115)

For my students those phonic workbooks were a manifestation of the structure of school, a structure they resisted. It is clear that they were not objecting to the work, per se, I had been right in my assessment of both their reading abilities and their readiness for this work. They were objecting to the form. They understood

workbooks to be silencing, impersonal manifestations of the structure of school. When I changed the format they changed their response and we spent many happy classes working on specific skills.

I still experienced a dilemma in my work with these students, it was my old image of myself as a teacher conflicting with my emerging image of myself as a teacher. It was made manifest in the planning that I was doing for my students.

> . . . I was wide awake at 3:00 this morning worrying about this trip to the pond. I have some worksheets and we looked at them yesterday just to get some information but they weren't too impressed with the idea of doing the worksheets and I still feel like if we're not going to the pond with four sheets of paper and lots of questions then something's wrong. We have lots of questions and we can ask them when we get there and we can look for the answers but I guess it's the idea that it isn't structured . . . set out in a way that anybody can look at. And this seems to be a constant struggle. . . . Where is the continuity in their work, where is this page after page after page of work to signify that something was being done in the classroom? And that's caused more than a few prickles up my spine as I have thought about that. I mean we have pages and pages that I have in their files that they've done but I really can't say that we have some kind of an organized notebook and I feel torn about that. (Journal, May 2, 1991, p. 121)

In responding to the needs and desires of my students I felt that I was creating authentic learning situations for them. It is evident that my students had a say in how we did our work in the classroom. In my heart I knew this was the best way because they were self-motivated and truly engaged.

> . . . they choose what it is they want to do that last half hour. But he kept on at the microscope so I left him be . . . and finally [he] looked at the clock, it was about ten after three, and he said . . . we've missed out on our center time, we keep forgetting, we get working overtime and we forget. And I thought that was so wonderful. (Journal, April 23, 1991, p. 11)

But at the same time I, not my students, felt pulled in two different

directions. There were few notes and tests. My students kept a science booklet in which they drew pictures of specimens they found through microscopic study. We had studied the microscope and its use prior to beginning this work. They were excited when they found something 'moving' and eagerly shared their findings. They talked over their findings with one another and looked through books to identify their specimens. At different times during the day they would lie on the floor and stare intently at the large jar of pond water we kept in the room for our study. A few students studied the ponds close to their homes.

There is no one correct way to teach but I do think that there is a traditional way of teaching that predominates in our schools. Teachers themselves must acknowledge and accept differences in teaching styles just as we have come to recognize differences in students' learning styles. In fact, learning and teaching styles are related.

> . . . I always feel guilty, as soon as they leave they need a duotang and they need looseleaf. . . . Now there's nothing wrong with that, it's just that it accentuates the . . . difference in the approaches we're using in teaching. And I suppose it wouldn't even bother me too much except that their teacher did say to me, I guess their fun is over. . . . We have our little experiment books and then they get put away, and it doesn't really amount to much. Or we spend most of our time in field trips and discussion and perhaps that doesn't look to be much . . . in terms of what's actually there available in a duotang. . . . And this is something I guess I'll continue to struggle with because I know how unhappy it makes [my daughter] to have to do all of that work on an ongoing basis and she's like my canary in the cage and I see, . . . she does it, but how upset she gets and I say to myself there has to be a better way. And perhaps what I did was ok with these kids. . . (Journal, April 16, 1991, p. 110-111)

The Journey's End

As we continued our work together I came to a period that, for me, was the beginning of the end. It was signalled by two distinct events. First of all, meetings were scheduled to plan the re-entry of my students into the regular grade four program. And secondly, I received a phone call telling me that I was not chosen for a teaching position in the coming school year. Together these events gave me a sense of the end. I do not mean the end in its more common usage, the end of June, another school year over. I mean it in a sense that is much more final.

Each time we gathered together as a class I had a different sense of our work together. I felt that I was capturing something for the last time. The students were spending increasing amounts of time as part of other grade four classes and I felt a sense of loss. Our routines were changing and this created new stresses. Perhaps because of these changes there was an added poignancy to the activities in which we all shared.

During these weeks, more than at any other time, I felt that my students were truly themselves. They did not find it necessary to hide behind their institutional images. They were children who revelled in the music from The Jungle Book (Duckwall et al, 1990) and spent many happy times listening to, singing, and acting out the songs. They were children who openly expressed their connection to and affection for me.

> I just can't explain . . . in words, maybe I need to think about it more, the difference in how we relate to one another and the things that I let them do and how they are so understanding of what it is I'm trying to do and they're willing to do it, even if they don't like

> to do it. (Journal, May 23, 1991, p. 131)
>
> . . . it was Adam who came to my defense and he's doing this a lot lately and has become very attached to me. He comes to find me in the staff room, he has to walk beside me, he wants to hold my hand. (Journal, May 30, 1991, p. 135)

They were children who eagerly awaited the work to be done and took great pleasure in their accomplishments. They were especially fond of 'cooking' and our forays into food preparation were profound educational moments for all of us.

My students helped to confirm my work as a teacher. This illustrated the nature of our relationships, our connections to one another had allowed both the students and the teacher to restory, to develop new understandings of what it meant to learn and to teach. The push and shove of our classroom had subsided to give and take and this, in turn, had eventually been replaced by mutual support. It was a journey that covered a lot of ground in a relatively short period of time.

> . . . I took Adam down [to rehearsal], it was just he and I . . . we stood there and he asked something about the time and so finally I just put my watch on his wrist and that kept him busy. But he stood there with me and when he asked to sit on the table I let him and when he started goofin' around he told me why and he came and stood by me. And the whole time he stood by me I had this wonderful sense, it was the funniest sensation, like this is where I should be, this feels good,I like this job [it was] something about him standing beside me . . . because six months ago he wouldn't have done that and it was nothing but trouble to get him to be anywhere and do anything . . . that you wanted him to do. And there he stood very maturely watching the concert, passing the odd comment, timing it with the watch and . . . it was a wonderful, wonderful kind of whatever that washed over me, this feeling of well-being. I should say this feeling of knowing I was in the right place. (Journal, June 6, 1991, p. 141)
>
> And Adam turned to me as we headed out and called, hey mom and then he realized what he'd done and they decided that that's what they would call me. One of the interpretive staff [at the heritage site] had asked if we were a family and I'd nodded my head, you know,

> in pretending along with the role playing that we had just dropped in as a family . . . how can I describe that moment, this wonderful feeling of well-being that flushed over me. . . . And we would run and sing between this place and that place . . . picking up information by osmosis, what they know now about that period in history is phenomenal. And they loved when something would occur and we would connect it with something we'd learned in the class room...Miles was so excited, Miles who has so many problems in his life right now . . . said to me this is the best field trip we have ever been on. . . . I just wish I could have some meter to measure this on and then I could say oh look we had . . . a 9.2 on the educational richter scale and I would feel better but I don't and I see the way these children are with me and I feel so badly that they're being rejected by the system. I don't blame them I understand that. What we need here is some continuity in programming so that these children can go on to another class like this. . . . I have these days and I think this is what it's all about. I love this. (Journal, June 13, 1991, p. 144)

Little did I know what lay ahead as I enjoyed a sense of well-being.

During this time I was aware that one of the students was experiencing great difficulty. Kenny brought his problems to school with him and we never knew which days would be good days and which days would be bad days. His behaviour seemed all the more extreme because of the changes in the classroom; even the other students had difficulty understanding him. This served to increase his isolation in the classroom. I was unable to establish an ongoing conversation with his family and this isolated me. I needed their help to better understand what was happening.

His problems were interwoven with a few incidents that disturbed me. I was left wondering just what we had accomplished. It was my colleagues who helped me better understand these incidents in the context of my students' lives. It had become a natural part of my teaching to reach out, to seek a better understanding of what was happening in my work. My feet were firmly planted in

this community.

> Wednesday last . . . Dennis and Kenny started fighting as they returned to the classroom after lunch recess. They walked into the classroom and started fighting. Immediately I stepped in to stop the fight, as I have done before, knowing that when they were separated they would listen to me and we could figure out what was happening. For the first time I was unable to do anything. I can only describe this fight as aggravated assault. I finally got Dennis out of the room by hollering at him to get out. He was closer to the door and seemed less angry than Kenny. Kenny was consumed with rage. I blocked the door so that he couldn't get out of the room. I was afraid what he might do to Dennis. Kenny eyed Dennis' baseball bat against the wall. He grabbed it and proceeded, he said, to destroy everything of Dennis' I do not recall how I got the bat away from him. A third student had been sent to find the principal. Miles returned to tell me that the principal was not in the school. I gave Miles the bat and told him to go and sit on the couch in the hallway. Kenny was screaming at me to let him out and he kept pulling on the door handle but I didn't move. I spoke calmly though I was afraid of his outburst. He tried to get out of the room through the window but the window is too high. He picked up a chair and threatened to smash the window in the door. He was screaming all the time, "You bitch, you let me out of here!" I just stood there. He put the chair down and started attacking the furniture in the room with his feet. The tables were overturned, the chairs went flying. And then he started to cry. I knew then he was calming down. But the entire situation was too much for me and I went into the hallway and started crying. I couldn't stop, I just kept sobbing. Two staff members in the hallway helped me out. One took Kenny and the other took Miles. I was left to take as much time as I needed to calm down. . . .
>
> I describe this incident in length because it left me feeling like a failure. How could it be that on the second last day of school we could possibly have an outburst like this? There was no pressure at school. We were engaging in activities they enjoyed. I had given in to their request that we spend some time in our own classroom rather than with the grade four class in which they had been integrated for the past month. What was wrong? . . . I talked this over with a colleague [who] pointed out the vast differences in the lives of these students as compared to my own. Yet I only have my story to go by. The end of a school year is traumatic for these children. The two months of summer loom on the horizon in a totally different light than they do for my [own] children. School is a place of relative calm and predictability. It is a constant in their lives. And then I remembered Miles asking me why school ended in

> June. At the time I thought that was a silly question but I answered by saying that school had to end sometime and June was the beginning of summer. He replied by suggesting that school should end in August. The next day, the last day of school, I watched my students in a new light. Their behaviour was just as bad as the day before. They tore the shingles off of the shelters at the baseball diamond and threw them out onto the playing field. They treated Miles like a punching bag. Adam even hit me. They were defiant every time they were asked to do something. . . . We finally got back into the classroom and it was time for report cards. I had brought them each a certificate and a gift . . . it wasn't fair to withhold the gift I had brought for each one of them. They couldn't help being who they were. They loved their certificates. I made them to honour each student's gift. They knew what the certificate would say and I was pleased that my constant efforts to make them feel they had a gift had paid off. I remembered their comments from earlier in the year that I was just making things up. They didn't think then that they could do anything well. Their eyes grew wide as I passed out the gifts. Then we counted down the last ten seconds and school was over. It was Dennis who started the goodbyes as he walked toward me with his arms outstretched. I am in tears again as I write thinking of his genuine outpouring of affection. Adam was next. This is not the first time he has hugged me. I treasure each time. Miles, too, is a hugger but more because of his own need to be hugged. Still, he followed along after Adam and by this time I was in tears. Kenny was last. He hugged the teacher who twenty four hours earlier he had screamed at in rage and called a bitch. (Journal, June 29, 1991, p. 11-14)

And so, in one way, our work together in the classroom ended just as it had started, in chaos and conflict. And yet in another way there was a profound difference for both the students and myself. Now I was able to develop an understanding of their behaviour. And they knew that I loved them and that I would not give up on them, they had offered something special to me, their 'selves', and I had accepted this gift in its entirety.

Chapter 6

Teaching Is A Moral Act

> *It may be that much of what is most valuable in the teaching-learning relationship cannot be specified and certainly not prespecified. The attitude characteristic of caring comes through in acquaintance. When the student associates with the teacher, feeling free to initiate conversation and to suggest areas of interest, he or she is better able to detect the characteristic attitude even in formal lectures. Then a brief contact of eyes may say, 'I am still the one interested in you. All of this is of variable importance and significance, but you still matter more.'*
>
> *Noddings, 1984, p. 20*

There can be no fixed plan for the development of an ethic of caring in the classroom. Relationships exist between individuals and evolve over time, each one is unique. But bound up in those relationships is the morality of my work as a teacher. How did my understanding of morality develop in the classroom? And how did I perceive the development of my students' understanding?

Teaching is a moral act. Tom (1984) wrote of a "moral relationship between teacher and student that is grounded in the dominant power position of the teacher" (p. 78). I made a conscious effort to restructure my classroom so that we shared responsibility. This sense of shared responsibility was evident in the work we were doing in the classroom. This was not enough. My students brought with them a well defined understanding of their place in school, they made it clear from the outset of our work together that they saw me as the boss and the responsibility for what happened in the classroom rested on my shoulders. I was always reminded of the fact that I was the adult, the teacher, the powerful one in the room.

The issue of power wove itself in and out of my work. My students spoke and acted from its polar opposite, powerlessness. They did not understand the dilemma that they had created for me. On the one hand they expected me to exercise total control, they did not take, nor expect to take, any responsibility for what occurred in our classroom. Yet if I acted on that expectation I would be perpetuating the very powerlessness that they felt rather than understood and which, in my understanding, had been the source of much of their resistant behaviour. Our conflicting views created classroom confusion but at the same time this scenario provided me, and eventually the students, with a milieu for rethinking the nature of morality in the classroom.

I understood my power in a different sense. Noddings (1984) described a teacher's power as awesome because "[i]t is she who presents the 'effective world' to the student. In doing this, she realizes that the student, as ethical agent, will make his own selection from the presented possibilities and so, in a very important sense, she is prepared to put her motive energy in the service of his projects" (p. 176-177). It is this kind of power that I referred to in my journal as curricular control.

The issue of power did not stand alone. There was a complexity to the relationship between teacher and student that was brought to the fore by my evolving image of myself as a teacher. I had not constructed my understanding of my relationship with my own children as one based on power. There were different ideas that guided the development of these relationships and because I saw myself, initially, as more mother than teacher it was these different ideas that I was

acting on in the classroom. So in our classroom it was the relationship between the teacher and the student, itself, that framed morality or, more generally, "apart from our relations to other people, there can be no moral necessity" (Piaget cited in Lyons, 1990, p. 69). Initially, I think, this also added to the confusion in our classroom. I put my time into developing relationships as a way of experiencing control differently, our understanding of control would be mutually constructed within the relationship itself.

Lyons (1990) defined morality as "responsiveness to another" (p. 41-42), therefore moral problems arise from "actual or potential fractures in the relationships between people or from concerns that someone has been excluded or not taken care of." For Noddings (1984) morality became an ethic of caring, based upon "human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for" (p. 1). These were the understandings of morality that I had constructed as a mother and it was these understandings that I acted upon in the classroom.

There was no immediate, positive response to my way of being in the classroom. But a closer look at what was happening told a different story. Belenky et al (1986) described a morality of responsibility and care where the context for moral choice must be understood, "moral choice must also be determined inductively from the particular experiences each participant brings to the situation" (p. 8). I had to look beyond myself in these relationships with the students. I needed to know the particular experiences of my students, just as I knew the particular experiences of my own children, in order to understand our developing relationships. "Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal

frame of reference into the other's" (Noddings 1984, p. 24). At first, I could not fathom my students' frames of reference. We had very different ways of telling very different stories. At times I felt that the chasm between us was too wide to bridge. "[E]very child enters the classroom in a vehicle propelled by that child alone, at a particular pace and for a particular purpose. Here is where . . . teaching becomes a moral act" (Paley, 1990, p. xii). What had begun as a critique of the lives of my students and the lack of caring that they had experienced became a critique of my own inability to listen, to suspend judgement and hear what it was that my students were trying to tell me.

To understand, it also became necessary to look beyond the classroom. The expectations of our work together in the classroom were rooted in societal expectations of schools. This lesson was made painfully clear to me the day that the boys and I were returning from one of visits to the nursing home. It was the kind of spring day that seeped into my being so that I, too, momentarily felt a sense of renewal. I had promised the students that on our way back from the nursing home they could float their 'boats' down the 'raging rivers,' twigs in the spring runoff had awakened a sense of wonder. We found a particularly good 'river' close to the school and began a series of races that prompted much discussion and camaraderie. As I stood at the finish line I was taken aback by the look of disgust on the face of a passing adult. I was momentarily humiliated by this response, there was a sense that I had been judged as a teacher and found a failure. But then the race began and the children came towards me, moving along with their boats, figuring out how the weight of their 'boats' and the movement of the water affected

speed. They arrived before me in a state of excitement. I awakened, then, to knowing that it was through the development of our relationships rather than the exercising of power that these children were able to learn. It was our relationship with one another that created a space for them to express their interests and for me to act on them. There was an authenticity to this kind of learning that will stay with them much longer than anything I may have imposed. Even as I write this I am struck by my need to continually figure it out, to justify what it is I do in the classroom. But I am ever mindful that societal expectations for schools are so pervasive that I can read them in the look of a passerby.

As a sense of community developed, a space was created for engaging in conversations, the students began to talk and I began to listen. I heard my students talk about significant relationships in their lives and I also heard and felt the emotional impact of those relationships on the lives of my students. On one occasion Adam came to school very upset by the suicide of his friend's mother. This prompted a discussion amongst the students about their relationship with their mothers. They put themselves in the place of Adam's friend and talked about how they would experience the loss of their mother. There was an intensity to the discussion that brought to the fore the understanding and strength of their relationships with their mothers.

In another classroom discussion a guest speaker had tried to illustrate a point by using the example of parental love. He addressed each student with the comment, "you love your parents and your parents love you, this is true isn't it?" Miles said, "no it isn't" and when the speaker suggested again that they did, indeed,

love him he said, "no they don't." This discussion gave me a perspective on Miles' life but it did not prepare me for his reaction to a severed relationship with his mother when a few months later Miles was apprehended by Social Services. I thought that this would be a positive move for him because of the problems he was experiencing at home. I had thought that this move would ease his pain. But his words and his actions told me otherwise. He knew his mother's shortcomings but she was still his mother and to rupture this relationship left him isolated. He was returned to his mother only to be apprehended again a short time later. His words and actions again became vehicles to release his pain. The complexity of this situation left me confused. I sought out a fellow teacher who helped me to sort through the issues, what was required was understanding without judgement. There were many stories weaving their way through this scenario and only by being open to these stories would I be able to maintain our relationship and help him when he felt so vulnerable.

Both of these students, during moments of crises, told stories that centered on an ethic of caring. They understood the place of caring in their lives but that did not include school. As I struggled to develop a holistic 'self' image of myself as a teacher I had confused them. I had blurred the boundaries between home and school in being my 'self,' a mother/teacher. As we worked through this confusion they came to 'see' school as a place for a more holistic 'self' expression. They made vulnerable the wide-eyed, wondering children that had been hiding under the tough, vulgar individuals I first met.

For me, the most telling examples of an ethic of care came from the students

themselves. Their actions spoke of their understanding of an ethic of care and its place in the life of our classroom community

> Dennis asked me today, Mrs. Kennedy why were you crying? And I thought for awhile and I thought oh what am I goin' to say? And then I told him that I was upset because my [child was] sick. And he said but why would that make you cry?. . . And I explained to Dennis that I didn't know what was wrong with her . . . it was such a complex situation but that seemed . . . [a] truth of that situation . . . I thought that was very sensitive of him just to leave me be on Monday morning and yet it troubled him enough that he remembered it four days later. (Journal, May 30, 1991, p. 134-135)

Other times, there were simple stories to illustrate their understanding of an ethic of care. Two of the students had each brought a bag full of worms from the schoolyard into the classroom. The worms were stored in their lockers and their excitement led me to their cache. When I asked them to explain this scenario they stated, matter of factly, that they were waiting for the right moment to ask me if they could keep the worms in the classroom. They were interested in worms, that was clear. But of greater interest to me was their understanding that there was a place for worms in the classroom, along with the proviso that my feelings about this mattered. We discussed the viability of keeping worms in the room and after reaching a decision not to keep the worms we wrote a story about them and ceremoniously returned them to the flowerbeds.

These stories illustrate that an ethic of caring came to pervade both the eventful and the uneventful, it was a part of both the everyday and the exceptional stories that we told about our lives together. What was developing in the classroom was an ethic of caring that included reciprocity. Initially our relationships were one-sided, I acted upon an ethic of caring, my students did not. They were acting upon

their need for 'self' preservation. This left me in doubt and feeling drained. My understanding was rooted in my experience of the mother-child relationship and a need to make the classroom a place like home. A simple moment of connection between a student and myself was all it took to nurture my perseverance. From the beginning of my work with this class there were glimmers of hope and I hung on to these as examples of the possibilities in our work together. Moments expanded to minutes, and so on until we had negotiated our way of being in the classroom. It was this common ground that provided the foundation for the students' learning in the classroom.

What troubled me about the relational quality of caring was its transferability. My students worked and played beyond the boundaries of our classroom. They were developing new understandings of what it meant to be a learner yet I sensed their confusion as they travelled to and from the classroom.

Our own relationships were not fixed. Over time and in different settings, we were constantly negotiating our way of being together because the predictability of life in the classroom was sometimes shattered by both the childrens' told and untold stories. Still, their understanding of an ethic of caring in school was grounded in our relationship, in our classroom. Some of the students were able to broaden their understanding of this ethic as they moved beyond the classroom, others were not. The work of negotiating a new way of being in school fell largely to my students. They had been labelled as behaviour disordered and that label travelled with them each time they left the classroom. Sometimes the students rose above the label and were commended but when they faltered the label returned.

The teachers with whom my students worked were in communication with me, we kept each other informed and this helped me to assess my students' growth. But I did not voice my understandings of our work together in the classroom, by the time I was able to tell the story of our work together I was gone. I understood the pieces; with the help of my colleagues, I was able to make sense of particular incidents. What I lacked, at the time, was an understanding of the 'big picture' that I could communicate to others. I think, also, I lacked the confidence to share the emerging picture. My students' confusion was not unlike my own but their expression of that confusion was problematic because they acted out their confusion.

Are classrooms and schools structured as places that serve an ethic of caring? How do schools come to an understanding of an ethic of care? When we talk about the morality of teaching is that morality extended beyond the classroom? As teachers go about their work are they enveloped in an ethic of care?

How do we understand the responses of our students? Could it be that the students have learned that schools are not places that honour an ethic of caring? Or perhaps the students brought that primary response of caring with them to school, but their vulnerability was misused.

> The child's vulnerability is sustained and intensified by the elementary school, where he is at the teacher's mercy . . . she transmits the sense of vulnerability to the child through two weapons thrust into her hands, sometimes against her will—discipline and the power to fail the child. Before these absolute

> weapons the child is even more vulnerable than with his parents; for with his parents the agony of vulnerability is allayed in part by love, and he can, within limits, fight back. In school, however, this usually is not the case; for in the first place, in the contemporary overcrowded class room, fighting back is a negation of necessary order and routine, and fear of failure is the pulse of school life. (Henry, 1971, p. 11)

All of these questions need to be addressed as we go about our work as teachers. We need to begin a dialogue, a conversation amongst teachers about our lives in classrooms and how it is that we understand the morality of our work. I have learned that if there are to be new possibilities in our work with children there must first be ways for teachers to engage in reflection upon our practice. It is what I have learned about myself that has made a difference in my teaching practice and my understanding of that practice. And what I have learned has come from sharing my stories of teaching with colleagues. I feel empowered, I am returning to the classroom with a renewed sense of purpose. I am a learner just as my students are learners and together we will journey forward.

I look forward to returning to teaching in September. I will take the understandings that I have constructed in this thesis with me but I am ever mindful that I am continually engaged in restorying.

> I have to be more conscious of the fact that this [teaching] is an ongoing, everchanging, evolutionary process and it will never work exactly the same way on Monday as it does on Tuesday or in this classroom as it does in another classroom. (Journal, June 13, 1991, p. 146-147)

I will do this by continuing to keep a journal. A journal addressed more than my need to make sense of my teaching practice. It provided me with an 'imaginary friend,' an unseen but thoughtful presence that helped me to think about my work. I have a need to engage in conversation about my work and the journal met that need, particularly in the beginning. As I began to feel a part of the school community I no longer addressed my journal entries to my 'imaginary friend.' As I re-read my journal the later entries sometimes contained, within the entry itself, an explanation of the event or feeling that I was recording.

If you could momentarily construe reading as watching then I was watching myself grow, personally and professionally, as I turned the pages. Or if you could momentarily construe reading as hearing then it was evident as I turned the pages that I was hearing my own voice. It is in my voice that I have found my power. And it is in my journal that I have found my voice. So it is that I will continue to write and to read and to re-read, to story and to restory because it is where I can find my 'self' and where I have discovered that my life has profound meaning.

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